Queering Nabokov: Postmodernist Temporalities and Eroticism in *Ada, or Ardor*

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Abbreviations

Ada	*Ada, or Ardor: A Family Chronicle*
AY	*Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years, by Brian Boyd*
BS	*Bend Sinister*
FB	*Father's Butterflies*
KQN	*King, Queen, Knave*
LL	*Lectures on Literature*
LRL	*Lectures on Russian Literature*
NTT	*Notes for Texture of Time*
PF	*Pale Fire*
RY	*Vladimir Nabokov: The Russian Years, by Brian Boyd*
SM	*Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited*
SO	*Strong Opinions*
TG	*The Gift*
TT	*Texture of Time*

1.0 Introduction

There is no shortage of studies about Vladimir Nabokov (1989-1977). In the last 100 years, his *oeuvre* has been exhaustively scrutinized by many different cultural frameworks and epistemological perspectives [1]. In the 1960s, detailed analysis of his parodies, wordplays, and intertextual references abounded in the light of Russian formalism and New criticism (Appel 1967; Stuart 1978; Johnson 1986; Frosh 1987). In the 1980s and 1990s, it became common to problematize the morality and ethics in his works through a systematic inquiry into the value of his style in the face of his cruel plots (Pifer 1980; Boyd 1985; Toker 1989; Rorty 1989; Connolly 1992). The study of exile and narratives of displacement gained a lot of attention in the 1900s and early 2000s, often discussing Nabokov's expatriation to different cultural contexts and also focusing on the intersection of the self and multilingualism (Ch'ien 2004; Straumann 2008; Trousdale 2010; Kager, 2013; Edel-Roy 2014; Darnell 2016). The study of time is yet another hallmark of the Nabokovian scholarship due to his almost obsessive return to the theme of nostalgia. Many scholars have focused on his unique conceptions of memory (Foster 1993; Rodgers 2018), his multiples narratives of exile (Cowart 1982; Píchová 2002; Brodsky 2002), the philosophical concepts of time underlying his works (Toker 1989; Alexandrov 1991; Grishakova 2012), and his plays with narrative time, especially patterns and spirals (Bader 1972; Zeller 1974; Boyd 1985; Dolinin 1995).

Although Nabokov's return to his past clearly bears a 'note of excess' and a 'hint of deviation,' the discussion of sexuality and desire is entirely avoided when it comes to the study of time. In light of the European high modernism, Nabokov is often

[1] For a more complete overview of the state of Nabokov's studies, see *The Garland Companion to Vladimir Nabokov*, org. by Vladimir E. Alexandrov (1995) and "Transitions in Nabokov's Studies," by Will Norman (2010).

interpreted as part of the modernist search for transcendence (Louria 1974; Sicker 1987; Foster 1993), when several *émigré* authors, like Nabokov himself, either facing mass immigration or the tragedies of the early twentieth century, searched for timelessness in art as a response to problematic historical contingencies, of which Joyce's epiphanies, Wolf's moments of being, Proust's involuntary memories are the most telling examples. When analyzed in the light of the postmodernist tradition, Nabokov's multiple temporalities are interpreted as a response to Cinematography or New physics (Wyllie 2006; Blackwell 2009; Trousdale 2010; Barabtarlo 2017). Both perspectives empty Nabokov's texts of any sexual content assuming that his temporal experimentations are a form of aesthetic virtuose, unrelated to desire, affect, and sexuality.

There are other reasons for this 'aseptic' and 'conservative' interpretations of Nabokov's work: Since 1971, when William Woodin Rowe set out to apply Freud's theory to Nabokov's *Lolita* and *Ada,* finding hidden sexual references in both novels, Nabokov publicly reprimanded him in a note to *The New York Review of Books (SO* 304-307*)* disavowing any sexual interpretation of his works and casting doubt on Rowe's abilities as a critic. Afraid of a public takedown, scholars were discouraged from pursuing sexual content in any of his work, and even today the topic is avoided as a way of respecting the author's deathbed wishes.[2] Besides that, the parallels between time and sexuality have been erased from the modernist and postmodernist study of time and space. The modernist search for transcendence has focused on language and literary devices, while the postmodernist canon forwarded by Edward Soja (1989), David Harvey (1989), and Fredric Jameson (1991) "actively excluded sexuality as a

[2] In the afterword to *Lolita* (1957), Nabokov dismissed again the discussion about sexual content in his books, also to erase all claims that identified *Lolita* to a pornographic book, confirming his search for aesthetic bliss, aestheticism, and transcendence.

category for analysis precisely because desire has been cast by Neo-Marxists as a ludic body politics that obstructs the 'real' work of activism" (Halberstam 5).

Needless to say that Nabokov's discussion of time is more complicated than the modernist categories of transcendence or the postmodernist category of historical indeterminacy. As Michael Rodgers explains, we have failed to account for several aspects of Nabokov's conception of memory and time (2018: 24). I will argue that Nabokov's late works have not only radicalized his early modernist approach towards a postmodern literature[3] but more importantly, his approach changed from a restorative nostalgia[4] towards a playful, sexualized, and bodily negotiation with the past, in which pleasure overrides loss.[5]

In the face of this manifest necessity to expand the discussion of time in Nabokov's works, in the present thesis, I aim to investigate one particular combination of themes, which arises at the end of Nabokov's career: the intersection of postmodernist temporalities, playfulness, and eroticism. I will focus primarily, but not solely, on *Ada, or Ardor: A Family Chronicle* (1969), because this is the only novel in which Nabokov provides this nexus, exploring memories as a bodily and tactile phenomenon. This does not mean, though, that Nabokov has not previously dealt with these topics in his career. The difference in *Ada* occurs in terms of 'visibility,' or how

[3] Postmodernism is characterized by a spatial shift, also known as the "spatialization of time" (Jameson 1991: 156), being in open dialogue with scientific theories from the first turn of the twentieth century due to the popularization of Einstein's relativity and also quantum physics (See Lefebvre 1974 [1991]; Heise 1997).

[4] For the purpose of this thesis, melancholic and restorative nostalgia means a desire to reinstate the past in the present in the face of the lost home, which is often characterized by the classic tropes of lost childhood and pastoral themes. This form of nostalgia is different from the playful acceptance of the past as gone and clear rejoicing of memory, which tends to be more reflective and experimental (See Freeman 2010: 14; Clewell 3-5).

[5] Maxim D. Shrayer confirms Nabokov's increasing interest in sexuality, explaining that, while the absence of sexuality in Nabokov's Russian phase is evident, when Nabokov begins writing in English, adopting American culture, this new scenario provided him with the linguistic ground to develop the treatment of sexuality and eroticism in his novels (2000: 509). Nabokov intentionally inserted sexual elements to his English translations of his early Russian novels, confirming his increasing interest in sexuality.

Nabokov finally responds to postmodernist paradigms in his most sexual novel, making his late erotic approach to time accessible to the reader. Different from his other novels, in which time is a key element but not the main subject, in *Ada*, time becomes the central theme, emerging from the narrative background to the surface of the text as a topic, for example, when the protagonist investigates the essence of time, or when time speeds up and slows down following the multiple narrative styles, or even when time shapes the characters' desire for each other.

With this in mind, I will address *Ada, or Ardor* through the frame of study called 'queer temporalities.' I am specifically interested in how scholars like Carolyn Dinshaw (1999), Jack Halberstam (2005), Carla Frecerro (2005), and Elizabeth Freeman (2010) share a common interest in understanding the intersection between time, gender, sexuality, and eroticism. This area of study is moved by the premise that time is not universal but experimented in unique ways by different social subjects—gays, queers, or black communities. However, the field of queer temporalities goes beyond, discussing how any form of historical investigation is in itself an intersubective "fantasy of rubbing up against the past" (Dinshaw xii) and materialized as a sexual relationship that takes place between the historical material and the historian or between historians/authors.

While Nabokov cannot be considered a queer subject, queer temporalities have proven to be a productive frame of analysis, and I observe, at least, four different queer ways through which he sexualizes time: 1) Nabokov embraces alternative forms of temporality, which are historically identified as feminine and queer (timelessness, circularity, patterns, rhythms, and texture) in opposition to linearity, clock and calendar time, which are associated with masculine time, problematizing his figure as a

predominantly masculine author.[6] 2) Nabokov's attempt to 'master time' becomes, during his career, a sexual phenomenon, shifting from a melancholic, romantic, restorative form of nostalgia to a playful, erotic, self-reflective, and postmodernist one (Clewell 3-5); Nabokov handles his memories and the historical material at his hands (photos, slides, books, etc.) as a sexual body. 4) He also sexualizes his relationship with other authors, transforming literary history into a homoerotic and misogynistic relationship. 4) Finally, Nabokov sexualizes his literary family and devices, especially parody, "inserting," "penetrating," and "manipulating" the material of others in his own writings in deviant ways.

Following this queer theoretical frame, my aim is not to identify Nabokov himself as a queer subject. Rather, my perspective takes into account that the term 'queer' actually refuses any identity position. It is, instead, a subject/object of contestation that challenges regulatory norms (Butler 1993: 228). In this thesis, though, queer has something to do with a critique of "(hetero)normativity, in cultural contexts and textual subjectivities" (Frecerro 5), specifically a critique of linearity and causality, as temporal modes that have been historically ingrained in the heterosexual reproductive model and the patriarchal family (Fergusson 180).

Several challenges arise, nevertheless, in this theoretical approximation. Queer theory has been preoccupied primarily with overcoming the conventional binaries between gender and with reintegrating gays, lesbians, and transgender people into its focus of analysis. From this perspective, Nabokov would not be a suitable candidate for the queer theory as he did not share the perspective of gender fluidity and sexuality. I neither partake in the hypothesis that Nabokov might have been molested by his uncle

[6] I do not claim that time is gendered, but that it has become gendered when inscribed in social, cultural, and historical spheres.

(Centerwall 1990), an incident that, if experienced by Nabokov, could have drawn him to this area of research to investigate trauma. On the contrary, it is clear to me that Nabokov, as a white, male, and canonical author, is not the best choice for the representation of minorities that have guided the agenda of queer theory. In fact, several scholars have claimed that he had erased the voices of women from his works (Kauffman 1992; Patnoe 2002; Goldman 2004) and also pointed to his demeaning comments regarding female authors, which lead to the discussion of Nabokov's misogyny. These problems emphasize the rift between his personal beliefs and the democratic accounts of queer politics. I apply 'queer' to Nabokov's writings then as a 'queer-relevant' in the words of Donald E. Hall (56).[7] Specifically, I search for "sites of emergence" (Muñoz 7) against normativity in either his plots or rhetoric, i.e., the moments in which Nabokov challenges patriarchy, teleology, and the nuclear family model in the name of unconventional relationships.

One might ask, at this point, why should one return to Nabokov, an overly debated figure of the modernist and postmodernist canon, instead of giving space to other queer and female voices? So, more dramatically, why should one be interested in his sexual temporalities at all?

Over the course of this thesis, I will demonstrate how Nabokov has willingly decided to 'stay with the trouble' in his plots and his literary relations, frequently depicting characters with unusual sexual desires and propensities. Furthermore, his *oeuvre* encompasses a variety of ambiguous feelings: he projects himself as an authoritarian male figure but yet underscores a secret wish for femininity, which I will analyze in due time.[8] He also criticizes patriarchy paradoxically, endorsing it as long as

[7] Donald E. Hall identifies works as 'queer-relevant,' when traces of the "'abnormal' even among 'normal' (canonical, heterosexual) philosophers and theorists" can be found (56).

[8] See the coda "Nabokov' Sexualized Tradition" and "Speak, Memory: Search for Timelessness" in the present thesis.

it redoubles his masculinity, forging through these contested drives a perfect site for discoveries. If Nabokov himself fails to represent the 'ideal' queer subject, analyzing his works as queer-relevant re-signifies the pureness of the Western canon, also actualizing his work in the face of the current discussion on gender and female politics in a post #metoo world. This approximation is also a political intervention in the practice of the critic, especially Nabokov's criticism, in which I attempt to insert ambiguous desires into the otherwise 'straight' literary canon.

Nabokov's 'sexual' temporalities also help us reaccess the modernist and postmodernist 'writing of time,' which is characterized by an overwhelming presence of sexuality and bodily aspects, although less attention has been paid to these topics. Since the end of the nineteenth century, the complex meeting of sexuality, technology, and space-time has been hovering over the Western literature and authors like Henry James (1843-1916), Marcel Proust (1871-1922), and James Joyce (1882-1941), just to mention the most canonical authors, have all dealt with this interesting intersection of matter.

With that in mind, I will open the present thesis with an overview of the current state of Nabokovian research in the light of the postmodernist and postmodernist discussion of time. I feel it necessary to come back to the rich Nabokovian scholarship in order to map out the terms in which time, sexuality, and his tradition have been shaped over the years. This chapter also offers the theoretical framework. I will examine the concept of 'queer temporalities,' pinpointing the authors and theoretical tools that will guide my analysis. I will observe how Nabokov shares with queer subjects a tendency to question the traditional concepts of the absolute and universal time, in which the notion of heteronormativity is ingrained. My particular interest, though, is to investigate how Nabokov intertwines sexuality and temporality, one of the main

interests of the field of 'queer temporalities,' focusing on the body and touch as a method of historical and literary understanding. This emphasis on texture and bodily encounters, I will argue, demonstrates a hidden wish for 'feminine' and 'queer' forms of sensibility as an alternative to the traditional methods based on detached sight and intellectual work. In the coda, *Nabokov's Sexualized Tradition*, my goal is to highlight how Nabokov demonstrates, since the beginning of his career, sexually charged relationships to his predecessors and how queerness can be observed since the very beginning of his career. I will outline the problems in the approximation between Nabokov and queer theory as he demonstrates a problematic relationship with his literary family in regard to both his predecessors and his readers. Nabokov ambiguously fetishizes a patriarchal literary family formed by male authors yet disrupts the patriarchal model of literary inheritance, investing in complex forms of fatherhood. I will unwrap this problem in the light of the modernist crisis on the categories of masculinity/feminine, and homo/hetero.

In the second part, *Ada: Sensually Experiencing Time*, I will present a close reading of *Ada, or Ardor*, investigating how time attains complex, multiple, and sexual formats. Although time has been a recurrent topic in Nabokov's work, it holds singular importance in *Ada*, radically emerging to the forefront as one of the major topics of the book. Here, I will overlap postmodern narratology and queer theory, scrutinizing how new physics imagery (layering, embedding, rewinding, forking) has been explored as bodily and erotic experience.

In the last part, *Texture of Time: Queering Intertextuality*, I will finally pay attention to *Texture of Time*, the treatise embedded in Chapter Four of *Ada, or Ardor.* I will grapple with Nabokov's long process of composition, analyzing the convoluted relationship between the protagonist and Nabokov's own view of time. Closely reading

Nabokov's manuscript, *Notes on Texture of Time*, I will observe how he queerly returns to his sources, G. J. Whitrow, Samuel Alexander, and J. T. Fraiser, borrowing verbatim passages from these sources to add sexual connotation to the scientific texts. While introducing these verbatim passages into his own writing, in an intertextual twist, he presents a limit-form between pla(y)giarism and erotic parody, transforming literaty history (also a form of time) into a bodily and rather convoluted relationship. In the final chapter, I analyze how Nabokov makes a sexual return to Henri Bergson's philosophy, understanding that time is a concept that takes form through the sensual body in both Bergson and Nabokov. In the afterthought, I will analyze Nabokov's notion of timelessness in *Speak, Memory* and how he outlines a fantasy of the womb, demonstrating a desire to occupy himself in a feminine and masculine role in his works.

My goal in this thesis is to demonstrate that Nabokov's late approach to time goes beyond the modernist ideals of transcendence and timelessness, entangling postmodernist temporalities with eroticism in unique ways, which highlights Nabokov's own unresolved queerness.

Part 01: Queering Traditions

> "Language has been granted too much power. The linguistic turn, the semiotic turn, the interpretative turn, the cultural turn: it seems that at every turn lately every 'thing'—even materiality—is turned into a matter of language or some other form of cultural representation. The ubiquitous puns on 'matter' do not, alas, mark a rethinking of the key concepts (materiality and signification) and the relationship between them. Rather, it seems to be symptomatic of the extent to which matters of 'fact' (so to speak) have been replaced with matters of signification (no scare quotes here). Language matters. Discourse matters. Culture matters. There is an important sense in which the only thing that does not seem to matter anymore is matter."
>
> (Karen Barad 2003: 801)

1.1 High-Modernism: Idealizing Timelessness

Early twentieth-century European literature has been often characterized by the "time-cult" (Lewis 1993 xviii). It is common sense to say that the modernist canon—James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* (1913-1927), Ezra Pound's *Cantos* (1925), and Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928)—was committed to the relations between memory, exile and subjectivity.[9] Although these authors also show a blatant interest in technology, sexuality, and biological experiences of time, this period became known by the search for transcendence via aestheticism and individualism (Olsen: 122). Jameson characterizes this moment by a turn-of-the-century "rhetoric of consciousness" (1991: 75), and Paul Ricoeur claims that modernist writers have investigated the opposition between objective and subjective time, privileging the second (1985: 242-243).[10] These accounts are based on an epistemological rift between external and internal worlds, claiming that modernism bends toward subjectivity and artistry, relegating objective time to a secondary position.

This conservative interpretation of modernism is prevalent in Nabokov's studies as well, especially when he is accessed via Marcel Proust and Henri Bergson.[11] Proust

[9] Scholars locate the beginning of the "time-cult" trend at the end of the nineteenth-century, when social and technical novelties, as the introduction of the Universal Standard Time (UT) and the foundation of the Greenwich Zero Meridian (1884) brought into discussion the opposition between global and local time. Electricity made clocks precise; telegraphs helped to connect people, forging an idea of simultaneity; photography materialized the past through palpable images, which could be constantly re-lived in the present (Kern 11-14). This period is also characterized by mass immigration and political traumas brought up by the Bolshevik Revolution, First and Second World Wars, and Nazism. These events have created perfect sites for the discussion of historical time in relation to subjective and emotional life.

[10] For more on time and modernism, see Ronald Schleifer, *Modernism and Time: The Logic of Abundance in Literature Science and Culture 1880-1930* (2000); *Time and Temporality in Literary Modernism* (1900-1950), edited by MDRN (2016).

[11] Since his first novel *Mary* (1926), Nabokov demonstrates a preoccupation with the artistic treatment of individual memory, a lesson controversially attributed to both icons of the early twentieth-century modernism, Proust and Bergson (Foster 1995; Laursen 1996).

became known as the epitome of the modernist model of transcendence and aestheticism since Beckett's famous account about his "negation of Time and Death, the negation of Death because the negation of Time" (1994 [1930]: 56). Due to the excessive presence of Proustian references in many of Nabokov's novels—*Despair* (1934), *The Gift* (1938), *Lolita* (1955), *Ada, or Ardor* (1969), but mostly in *Speak, Memory* (1951)—Proust's references in Nabokov's work helped consolidate the idea that Nabokov's approach to time occurs, just as in Proust, via aestheticism and subjectivity.[12] In this token, John Burt Foster says that Nabokov shares with Proust the same sense of modernity: both writers "assume a certain persistence of memory as the background for any true awareness of originality" (1995: 477). Implied in this interpretation is the idea that Nabokov tries to overcome time's movement and death through memories and aesthetic epiphanies, ultimately narrowing down the discussion of time in Nabokov's work as an ability to revive his past via his superior artistic talent (Alexandrov 1991: 7).[13]

In the same token, Nabokov's modernism has also been analyzed via Henri Bergson, a prominent French philosopher from the first turn of the twentieth century, hugely influential to figures like Joyce and Proust.[14] The French philosopher argues that

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[12] For more on Nabokov and Proust, see David L. Jones, "Dolores Disparue" (1966); J. E. Rivers, "Proust, Nabokov and *Ada* " (1984) ; Christian Moraru, "Time, Writing, and Ecstasy in *Speak, Memory*: Dramatizing the Proustian project" (1995); Timothy L. Parrish, "Nabokov, Dostoevski, Proust: *Despair* " (2004).

[13] Richard Rorty explains that Nabokov "wanted to see some connection between creating tingles, creating aesthetic bliss, being an artist in the sense in which he and Joyce and Dickens were artists and Orwell and Mann were not, and freeing oneself from time, entering another state of being. He is sure there is a connection between immortality of the work and of the person who creates the work between aesthetics and metaphysics, to put it crudely. But, unsurprisingly, he is never able to say what it is" (150).

[14] John Burt Foster claims that Nabokov has responded to Marcel Proust's involuntary memory, providing a less sentimental and more deliberate methods of accessing memories, which Foster called "anticipatory memory" and "future retrospection" (1993: 54-57). While emphasizing a concept of memory based on deliberate creation, Nabokov's approach would be in opposition to Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot's famous mythifications of the past (1993: 224). Nabokov would also be in conflict with the Marxist notion of history as repression, or Sigmund Freud's contemporaneous scheme of *Familienroman,* memory, and trauma, focusing on memory as pleasure and delight. Involuntary memory is defined as a spontaneous way of accessing memory, which is triggered by a sensorial experience in the present. The shock of an immediate event connects us with several recollections, flowing back in

time is not a spatial or mathematical succession of events, but constant movement, also calling time an "unfolding multiplicity" or "expanding magnitudes" (xi). Bergson's theory has put into question the traditional idea of teleology, sequentiality, and cause and effect to the understanding of history and time, and Nabokov shared with him the interest to apprehend time outside conventional linear models and metaphors. Although veiled references to Bergson are already present in *Mary*, Nabokov will address the philosopher more openly in *Speak, Memory* and *Ada, or Ardor*, when he says, in a similar fashion of duration, that he likes to fold his "magic carpet, after use, in such a way to superimpose one part of the pattern upon the other" (SM 102-103).[15] These Bergsonian superimpositions of events are indeed present in Nabokov's novels, also known as "Nabokov's patterns of time." Scholars frequently interpret this literary device in the light of Hegel, Nietzsche, or Bergson (de Jonge 1979, Boyd 1985, Q. Anderson 1987, Rodgers 2018). For Julia Bader, for example, these designs are an attempt of the mind to create "life through its perception and its language," temporarily stopping time sequentiality (109). In the same vein, Marina Grishakova reads Nabokov's writings as "an attempt to make out and take down an imaginary book, already existing in 'some other, now transparent, now dimming, dimension'"(65). In

cascade to the past, like the madeleine episode in Proust. *Anticipatory memory* consists in actively making the present a memory to remember. Nabokov calls this, in *Speak, Memory,* a "spiteful demon" when transforming the very specious present into a kind of paralyzed past as perceived by a doddering memoirist" (188). The future retrospection is mentioned in *The Gift* and *Speak, Memory*. It regards a process of dream or imagination (frequently hallucinatory), in which we are able to predict a specific event or image in the future. Later, this dreamed image is combined with the actual event in reality, and the assemblage of both composes a unique form of memory (Foster 1993: 54-57).

[15] Mary is overloaded with allusions to Bergson, like in this paragraph: "[t]ime for him had become the progress of recollection, which unfolded gradually. And although his affair with Mary in those far-off days had lasted not just for three days, not for a week but for much longer, he did not feel any discrepancy between actual time and that other time in which he relived the past, since his memory did not take account of every moment and skipped over the blank unmemorable stretches only illuminating those connected with Mary. Thus no discrepancy existed between the course of his life past and life present […] It was not simply reminiscence but a life that was much more real, much more intense than the life lived by his shadow in Berlin" (66). The term "unfolding" here probably derives from Bergson's *Time and Free Will* (1889), in which 'duration' is defined several times as "this unfolding multiplicity" (xi). Furthermore, the passage above recalls memory not as a chronological sequence of events, but as elements stitched in time by someone's consciousness.

these interpretations, the non-linear structure of Nabokov's works equates the author's mind to the otherworld, suggesting that he can overcome temporal linearity through language and aestheticism. These accounts confirm, just like in interpretations made via Proust, that Nabokov is continuously searching for transcendence, i.e. to evade time.

Not all scholars have accepted Nabokov's search for transcendence so easily, though. Leona Toker's interpretation (1989), much less mentioned in the scholarship, says that like Schopenhauer, Nabokov has desired a momentary silence of all will, in which there is the suppression of the self toward complete nothingness—the ultimate abolishment of the cosmic world, not as "void or darkness," but as wholeness (5-6).[16] In this interpretation, Nabokov's metaphysics becomes the expansion of the world as 'everywhere,' and not a binary 'another' world yet to be attained. In 2006, a heated debate between Martin Hägglund and Brian Boyd provided other versions of his 'timelessness.' Boyd explains that, for Nabokov, the otherworld is not a negation of time, but an expansion of the present, which aligns him to Toker's interpretation (2006: 469). Hägglund gives another reading entirely, saying that Nabokov does not desire transcendence. He, in fact, bears a paradoxical relationship to time, informed by feelings of chronophilia and chronophobia (i.e., Nabokov desires temporal phenomena [chronophilia] at the same time he fears to lose it [chronophobia]). Here, Nabokov's longing to "escape the prison of time" is just a response to his attachment to human temporality (nostalgia and memory), not a desire to be completely liberated from it (2006: 447-448). Marina Grishakova (2012) accesses Nabokov's eternity in terms of circularity, "via Uspensky's fourth dimension, via Bely and theosophists to Tolstoy," saying that Nabokov explores the image of the *aevum,* when the past, present, and future

[16] Also see Leona Toker, "Philosophers as Poets: Reading Nabokov with Schopenhauer and Bergson" (1991).

come together (132). Michael Rodgers (2018) reads the same notion of circular time in the light of Nietzsche's eternal recurrence (27).[17] In these interpretations of Nabokov's timelessness, there is an acceptance of time as a philosophical and abstract entity in which the body and sexuality are obliterated.

Finally, Nabokov's concept of time has also been defined as a form of consciousness (Henry-Thommes 31). The authors confirm this in an interview, saying: "[T]ime without consciousness – lower animal world; time with consciousness – man; consciousness without time – some still higher state" (*SO* 30). [18] His timelessness is confounded with Nabokov's spirituality, suggesting that in the Otherworld (after or before death), humans would be liberated from time and consciousness into a better experience. This insistence on achieving transcendence via artistic device, subjectivity or higher consciousness is so ingrained in Nabokov's scholarship that reading him in the light of other mundane aspects, such as sexuality and bodily phenomena, seems to be a form of treachery to his works. This transcendental trend led to an almost naïve belief that Nabokov's art could indeed be above historical contingency or that his works would be a portal to the otherworld, confirming the view of Nabokov as a supreme author.

In this thesis, my goal is to change this interpretative trend, explaining how modernist literature has initiated a new time paradigm through which technology, time,

[17] Scrutinizing the ambivalences between human time and transcendental time, Alexandrov finds, in *Invitation to Beheading,* Gnostic references, claiming that the material world is a fall from transcendence in the book. Following this token, materiality and clock time are not only inferior but also inherently evil and corrupted (85). Also see Kellie J. Benn, *The Gnostic Journey of Cincinnatus in Nabokov's 'Invitation to a Beheading'* (2012). Nabokov's early works (*Mary, King, Queen, Knave,* and *Despair*) indeed seem to be based on a sharp dichotomy between human and transcendental, which, I will argue, became more complex during his career.

[18] Brian Boyd helped to consolidate Nabokov's 'poetics of consciousness' as the title of his landmark book *Ada: The Place of Consciousness* (2001 [1985]) already highlights. More recently, he has attempted to overcome this immaterialist approach, stating that Nabokov deploys new reading processes, brain plasticity, and multi-level thinking, which stress the practical and corporeal aspect of mental processes ("The Psychologist" 2011). For more on Nabokov and theory of the brain see J.D. Quin, "Nabokov's Neurology" (1993); Lisa Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction: Theory of The Mind and the Novel* (2006).

and the body become indissociable, against which Nabokov's concept of time as a bodily and sexual construction can be understood in the light of queer theory.

1.2 Reviewing Modernism: Technology, Sexuality, and Time

While the modernist canon constantly searches for timelessness, the period, in fact, converges various "versions of temporalities and sexualities" (McIntire 1). The author's from this period testified a shift from the Newtonian notion of absolute time to Einstein's theory of relativity testified a shift from the Newtonian notion of absolute time to Einstein's theory of relativity (1905-1915), which means that time became "richer" and full of imaginative potential. This feeling of amazement was also experienced in everyday life when such new apparatus as telephones, electric light, x-rays, aviation, and super microscopes multiplied the sensory and motor capacities of the common man, intermediating new relations to our corporeal existence in time and space (Maude 34). In other words, a multiplicity of new discourses and technologies propelled a shift from the concept of 'absolute time' to 'temporalities,' which means that "time and space are not within time and space but in Man and society" as well (Kellerman 31). One could say that in order to understand time's manifestation, it has become necessary to contextualize it in a broader debate regarding different instances (macro and microspheres), technology, and even bodily experiences. Modernity, therefore, has linked in unprecedented ways the discussion of time, body, and technologies that bring all these spheres together to the discussion of time as a whole (Armstrong 1998: 3). However, only recently the modernist canon about time has been reviewed under this paradigm (Armstrong 2016; Rieger 2005; Ferguson 2007). Sara Danius (2002), the Nobel laureate literary critic, promoted new interpretations of modernism, discussing how technologies are inseparable from high modernism's

'crises on the senses', often addressing the modernist feeling of time past with the characters' corporal existence. Focusing on Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* (1913-1927), Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), and Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* (1924), Danius explains that "technology is in a specific sense constitutive of high-modernist aesthetics" (3). For her, these new technologies entail new forms of storing, transmitting, and reproducing sense data which articulate new perceptual and epistemic realms and are fundamental to understanding the development of mass culture, avant-garde art, and cinematography, but also to access the classic high-modernist novels. Avoiding the dichotomy between internal and external worlds, Danius explains how these new technological devices have increasingly broadened the sensory experience in Proust, leading to an elaborate phenomenology of perception in the French author, while technology in Joyce led to a full-blown internalization of technological modes and its representation in the novel. She analyzes the telephone call in Proust's *The Guermantes Way* (1920), for example, to demonstrate how the dissociation between body and voice has brought to the twentieth-century audience new unsettling feelings, as the following scene so exemplary demonstrates:

> "Granny!" I cried to her, "Granny!" and I longed to kiss her, but I had beside me only the voice, a phantom as impalpable as the one that would perhaps come back to visit me when my grandmother was dead" (Proust, 137).

Telephony in this scene creates a phantasmagoric and double perception of Marcel's beloved grandmother that exacerbates the narrator's feelings regarding his grandmother's impending death, ultimately fueling the theme of lost time, the center topic of this piece. Scenes like this abound in Proust, and the presence of telephones, photos, and electricity in this work come to be part of a new sensitive body just like Nabokov's cameras, films, photos, slides, and projections will also enhance the author's

bodily perceptions, often with sexual tones. Joyce's *Ulysses,* on the other hand, as the epic of the human body and a record of the modernist reinvention of the human body (Danius 152), dwells on an esthetic of immediatism where visual and aural sensations become an end in themselves, migrating into questions of form. In Joyce, the detailed description of bodily functions—strolling, looking, eating, sleeping, digesting, masturbating, shitting—adapts cinematic framing technique to give life to an animated and personified internal world:

> His hand accepted the moist tender gland and slid it into a side pocket. Then it fetched up three coins from his trousers' pocket and laid them on the rubber prickles. They lay, were read quickly and quickly slid, disc by disc, into the till. (Joyce, 181)

In the passage above, Joyce not only gives a voice to the body as it transforms the body into the very protagonist of the scene via cinematographic cuts, highlighting vision, touch, and sound to increase the vividness of an otherwise mute universe. Danius, therefore, pays attention to how the body and technology are developed hand-in-hand during the modernist period, and her work becomes essential to the present study of Nabokov as long as she focuses on the inseparable relation between aesthetics, technology, and perception. Danius's analysis, however, intentionally avoids the discussion of gender, sexuality, or tact, which are the central focus of this thesis.

Julia Kristeva also offers a more radical understanding of modernism. Applying psychoanalytical, feminist, and linguistic approaches to Proust, she focuses on how he develops new perceptions of memory and senses in three famous pieces: "Women's time" (1981), *Proust and the Sense of Time* (1993), *Time and Sense* (1996). Combining Proust, Freud, Bergson, and Heidegger, she claims that subjectivity and temporality are co-existent, "[t]he subject is not *in time,* but must be itself understood *as time*" (Keltern

87), directly questioning the modernist myth of timelessness. According to her *In Search of Lost Time,* Proust offers a new form of temporality, "the felt time" that puts into question the idea of time as a linear and mental event in the name of 'embodied memories' and dislocated forms of chronology. In her words:

> The writer [Proust] is no philosopher... In the proustian text the non temporal nature of the unconscious (as Freud would have it) goes side by side with overpowering awareness of being. The psychic absorbs the cosmic and, beyond that, Being itself is diluted in style. So imaginary experience is not unaware of the temporality of concern. But it goes beyond it, in a search for joy. (1993, 25-26)

In Kristeva's aesthetic approach to time, she opens space for an embodied, timely existence that is centered in the "*Sein,*" gendered and dependent on the senses. Her turn to the senses, affect, and style, which is not completely devoid of sexuality, will be crucial to understand the queer turn to temporalities in the 2000s. Kristeva's approach is also essential to grasp Nabokov's Proustian embodiment of memory, which I will analyse in Part Two, *Ada: Sensually Experiencing Time.*

In this same vein, Gabrielle McIntire (2008) observes how T.S. Eliot (1888-1965) and Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) "think the past through the language of sensuality and eros," in similar terms that I will analyze *Ada, or Ardor* (1).[19] MacIntire contests the classic reading of modernism as "hostile to history," "suffering from the burden of the past" (5). She claims that Eliot and Woolf bear an ambiguous view of memory as pain and pleasure, in which time is firmly lodged in the body. She traces in

[19] Adam Watt (2011), avoiding the long discussion of Proust's aestheticism, also analyzes the meaning of "telephone exchanges and telegrams, bicycles, central heating, elevators and aeroplanes" *In Search of Lost Time*.
The study of James Joyce's *Ulysses,* as an epic of the human body, has been more frequently analyzed through this frame, in which discourses on health, sexuality, technology, popular culture, and religion are also taken into account (See Attridge 2004; Brown 2006; Lesser 2017).

Eliot's poems, *Columbo* (1909-1922), *Gerontion* (1920), and *The Waste Land* (1922) figures of sex, women, and queerness in relation to historicity and remembrance, more specifically in how Eliot establishes a tropological pattern between the physicality of the human body—specifically the female body—and the spatiality of memory, as the following passage of *Gerontion* demonstrates:

> After such knowledge, what forgiveness? Think now
> History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors
> And issues, deceives with whispering ambitions,
> Guides us by vanities. Think now
> She gives when our attention is distracted
> And what she gives, gives with such supple confusions
> That the giving famishes the craving. (32)

In this passage, Eliot personalizes history as a woman ("she"), and using a clear reference to the female genitalia ("cunning passage" and "contrived corridors"), he expresses his ambivalence regarding history's "slippery meanings" in which the female body of history becomes (in a rather misogynistic scene) an object that generates anxiety because it's deceiving, ambitious, and vain. Eliot's projection of the female body onto history and time can be placed as part of a longer romantic tradition in which the female body was projected onto space, more specifically nature and then cities, as an untamed space that needs to be explored and dominated by men.

Following a similar tenet, Elizabeth Freeman (1998) analyzes Nabokov's *Lolita* in the light of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Captain Mayne Reid, and Edgar Allan Poe. She explains that these texts form a tradition of the "American Pedophilic picaresque," in which historically a male foreigner uses the body of a younger female child as a means of exploring territorial expansion and integration, observing more than a projection of

a sexualized body into space. According to Freeman, the little girls function as guides that "coordinate her male's companion transitions through a jumble of rural and urban places," conferring "identity and membership to them as a kind of sensual competence" (1998: 866). As a renowned scholar from the field of queer temporalities, Freeman brings together the analysis of space-time and the politics of gender and sexuality to her interpretation of *Lolita,* which has helped to settle my own interpretation of a different book, *Ada, or Ardor,* in terms of an erotic exploration of time that takes place via the body of a young girl as well. Jenefer Shute's (2003) analysis of the representation of the female body in *Lolita* and *Ada, or Ardor* comes to similar ends. Shute says that in both works, Nabokov creates an "inventory of the female body" as a "cartography of desire" which lavishes on the body of an immature child, which has not yet constituted itself as an object to be looked at and desired as the following passage from *Ada* so keenly represents:

> Was she really pretty, at twelve? Did he want—would he ever want to caress her, to really caress her? Was she really beautiful? Her black hair cascaded over one clavicle and the gesture she made of shaking it back and the dimple on her pale cheek were revelations with an immediate recognition about them. Her parlor shone, her blackness blaze. The pleated skirts she liked were becoming short. Even her bare limbs were so free from sutan that one's gaze, stroking her shins and forearms could follow upon them the regular slants of dark hair, the silks of her girlhood. (*Ada* 5)

Such inventory of the body fetishizes the child by anaphoras ("her black hair," "her parlor," "her bare limbs") undressing the sexualized child from top to bottom in the logic that resembles a striptease. Shute says that, in *Ada* and *Lolita,* the male gaze becomes a form of caress, enforced by the tactile evocations ("caress," "stroke," "silk")

as the male narrator invites the male readership to share with him this voyeuristic and erotic dynamic of discovery (112).

In this thesis, my aim is to extend Kristeva (1979, 1993, 1996), Danius (2002), Macintire (2008), Freeman (1998), and Shute's (2003) analyses, observing how Nabokov explores a spatial and temporal 'erotic rhetoric' in *Ada, or Ardor,* more specifically, in the protagonist's philosophical investigation of *Texture of Time,* which is entangled with his erotic experiences throughout his life. In *Ada,* however, this sexual projection is not always marked by a patriarchal projection of a female-gendered body into history, nature, or the city, but a queer, sadomasochistic, and masturbatory practice in which time itself also gains a body grasped in unconventional ways. I am arguing, therefore, that Nabokov's complex 'writing of the time' is also part of this change in paradigms. It is primarily an ambivalent place of pain and pleasure, a *locus* of 'embattlement' in which he articulates time, body, sexuality, and technologies[20] Sexuality, in particular, comes at a later moment in his career, while technological devices have been present all along throughout his *oeuvre*. Already in *Mary* (1926), for example, there is a famous scene in which the train crosses the protagonist's window, proving a play of optical illusion. The train becomes a central key of the story as it highlights the life of the *émigré* as a ghost (Nan 2012); in addition, photography is a key to triggering memory in the novel. In *King, Queen, Knave* (1928), Nabokov establishes a loose dialogue with relativity, finding in Einstein's disquieting formula a correspondence to the sexual distress of the characters. *The Gift'*s (1938) opening pages also have references to new physics, presenting playful images of time, space, and light

[20] Nabokov's approach to time is somewhat uneven in his *oeuvre*. While *The Gift* (1938) and *Ada, or Ardor* (1969) combine several of his interest in one single text—philosophical discussion of time, experimentations with narrative time, and a discussion on the concept of literary evolution—*Lolita,* for example, is undoubtedly less experimental than *The Gift* in terms of narrative time.

(Blackwell 2003; Paperno 1992). In fact, *The Gift* has so many experiments with narrative time that experts debate if it is a linear axis, a progressive tripartite structure, or an endless spiral (Toker 1989, Waite 1995, Dolinin 1995, Leving 2011).[21]

Despite these manifold experimentations with time, Nabokov's early works clearly and more drastically oppose subjective and objective time, providing a good example of Nabokov's early "bi-spatiality" (Levin qtd. in Grishakova 236).[22] Dolinin aligns his early "two-worldedness" to the Romantic and Symbolist tradition, saying that Nabokov continues and yet drastically abandons this format during his career (1995: 7-8). Agnés Edel-Roy also says that a new "distribution of the perceptible occurs'' in Nabokov's Swiss phase, which she defines as a new distribution of "space and time, place and identity, speech and noise, the visible and invisible" (12). David Rampton, in his analysis of *Transparent Things* (1972), also notes how Nabokov refrains from his initial nostalgia towards the end of his career: "[o]bviously, he [Nabokov] is asking some questions when he gets older: What has all this remembering finally got me? Do my collected works, with dates in parentheses after each title, represent an ultimate victory of linear time? What do I do next?" (172). Implied in Rampton's observation is not only that Nabokov has searched for new ways to explore time, but that his *oeuvre* can be defined as a constant attempt to achieve temporal mastery, which I argue leads to Nabokov's constant experimentation with time and to the final collapse of two of his favorite themes, temporalities and sexualities.

I believe that Nabokov complicates his approach to time by different means throughout his career. He not only entangles more temporal spheres (narrative layers, historical dates, biographical information, scientific theories, biological and physical

[21] If one focuses on the complexity and variety of narrative devices, *The Gift* and *Ada* provide unique examples of Nabokov's approach to time, as the epitome of his Russian and American phase.
[22] Norman calls the author's responsive attitude toward history, Nabokov's early "defensive dialectic" (2012: 2).

experiences of time), but he also entangles eroticism and time, which is absent in his less sexual Russian novels. I claim there is a rhetorical and epistemological shift from an early emphasis on transcendence and desire via aesthetics and technology to his later exploration of time's heterogeneity as eroticism. To understand this shift, it is necessary to think about desire and nostalgia in the terms that Elizabeth Freeman articulates when she says that nostalgia, as desire, implies a longing for the lost object, a historiographical desire to write and reinstate the lost one in the present, which can be observed in Nabokov's Russian novels and his wish to recuperate his lost childhood.[23] Erotics, on the other hand, has something to do with encounter and play, "less in damaged holes than in intersections of body parts, less in loss than in novel possibility (will this part fit into that one?...) (Freeman 2010: 14).[24] Roger J. Porter says, by the same token, that Nabokov's narrative transforms "a longing for home into an ironic acceptance of, and even a luxuriant pleasure in, the displacement" (17). It is in the face of this erotic and playful exploration of time that I understand Nabokov's late works, especially *Ada*, when time is clearly more embodied and experimental than desirous and transcendental.

1.3 Queer Temporalities: Introducing Sexuality into the Study of Time

At the beginning of this chapter, I explained how an aseptic conceptualization of modernism has wiped sexuality and technology from this period in the name of a high-

[23] In this sense, the desire, and its ontological lack, becomes a mark of Nabokov's early works, embedded in the discourse of exile, loss, nostalgia and even melancholia. Judith Butler notes in her analysis of gender identity that melancholia is "the archeological remainder…of an unresolved grief" as if one had preserved the lost object as an aspect of a person's subjectivity (1997: 133).

[24] Ronnie Ancona traces back to the romantic tradition the parallels between time and desire, saying that in this period temporality was understood as a threat: the inability of love "either to endure into the future or to be reciprocated passionately in the present…the poet/lover's desire to dominate the temporality of the beloved" or the "romantic ideal that loves conquers time" (1). Temporality, however, is not always a danger as the romantic-modernist tradition suggests, it has also been shaped as the very source of eroticism.

brow, monumental, and transcendental literature. I also explained how these classic modernist readings have been reshaped in the light of new cultural and literary studies that searched for a less naive vision of modernism (Danius 2002; Kristeva 1993; McIntire 2008, Freeman 1998, Shute 2003), inserting the body and technology as essential elements to the understanding of this period. It was, however, only with the rise of queer studies, in the turn of the 1900s, that a more radical view of high-modernist literature came to light.

Queer theory applies an interdisciplinary approach, in which sexuality, gender class, and race come to the forefront, becoming key elements to understand modernism. Besides that, queer studies search for unambiguous drives, shifting the modernist canon from hypermasculine authorship, often described as a homophobic and misogynist "male heterosexual club," of which Nabokov, Proust, Joyce and Eliot are symbols, towards a discussion upon homosexual desires and hybrid genders at the center of this very same modernist tradition. This means that queer theory is not so much interested in the projection of the female and male body in time and space (and its relation to technology), but in the ambiguous drives, i.e., the establishment and resistance of normative sexuality and gender bringing more complexity to the table.

It's no accident that queer theory has been fascinated by the authors of modernism and postmodernism, finding in this period a privileged locus of investigation. There are several reasons for the queer scrutiny of 20th-century authors. First of all, early modernist literature has been part of the very conceptualization of homosexuality—in conjunction with medical, psychological, and juridical discourses—by assigning individuals an identity that contrasted with another newly formulated concept of heterosexuality (Foucault 1984, Halperin 1990). According to Eve Kosofsky's seminal work *Epistemology of the closet* (1990), since the end of the

nineteenth century, Western culture as a whole has suffered from an endemic crisis of homo/heterosexual, and authorship in itself is shaped in this period as a mode of resistance to modern sexual regulation. This means that several authors of this period have dramatized anxiety in relation to the concept of hetero and homosexuality, incorporating in their work the systematic oppression of homosexuality or/and underscored the very negotiations of homosexuality, heterosexuality, and queerness that have been conceptualized more recently as "male homosocial desire," "homosexual panic," "closet speech acts," "antihomophobic," "antifeminist negotiations," "crisis of the female status," etc. (Sedgwick 37). Besides that, the early modernist and modernist master-canon—from Oscar Wilde's trials, Proust's dense homosexual language to Virginia Wolf's androginius protagonist in *Orlando*—has provided a formative cultural reference for gay, lesbians, and queer studies, and they are seminal to the shaping of these unresolvably unstable concepts.

Particularly interesting for the present study is the unique dymanic between homosocial and homosexual desire in heterosexual authors and how they scorn the bynarism between hetero and homo in name of queer nuances and potentiality. As Colleen Lamos says in *Deviant Modernism* (1998), "the perversity of their [Eliot, Joyce and Proust] writings is not a repressed libidinal truth but the effect of a larger, cultural conflicts concerning the definition of masculine heterosexuality with which their texts are fully engaged" (2). Henry James' rhetoric has also been particularly productive to understanding these queer nuances as scholars (Bora 1997, Sedwick 1985, Ohi 2003), paying detailed attention to James' language, have found in his works a good example of this literary performative queerness. Avoiding any categorization of James as a repressed gay or asexual author, what is at stake here is how the opacity of his language,

double-meaning sentences, evocation of touch, and luxuriantly overstuffed literary stract can be related to queerness.

As a modernist author himself, Nabokov also converts his problematic axes between homo[25] and hetero in his essays and biographical texts, which I analyse in more detail in the *Coda*.[26] I will also find in Nabokov's late prose a similar queer rethoric which appears, not incidentally, related to his postmodern exploration of time and a cartography of time as a sexualized body. However, to understand Nabokov's unique sexualized approch to time, I will invoke a new body of theoretical work broadly categorized under the rubric of 'queer temporalities.' Different from the cultural studies mentioned in the last chapter, queer temporalities is unique in how a queer approach has finally incorporated affect[27] and non-conventional forms of sexuality into understandings of time, framing it as an entity that is experienced and produced through gender, race, and culture.[28] Queer brings, therefore, a broader view of how time and sexuality come together, which is more productive to comprehend Nabokov's sadistic and unorthodox desires to master time.

[25] The presence of homosexuality in Nabokov's works has also given rise to a number of interesting scholarly pieces, variously employing biographical, philological, political, and reader-theory perspectives. See Kevin Ohi, "Narcissism and Queer Theory in *Pale Fire* " (1998/1999); Anna Brodsky, "Homosexuality and the Aesthetic of Nabokov's Dar" (1997); Etkind, "Left Side of the Moon: Nabokov's personal Terminology of Homosexuality"(2015).

[26] Carolyn Dinshaw explains the turn to new temporalities, saying: the "deconstruction of the Western liberal notion of the sovereign subject—and the attendant sovereign unities of language, narrative, nation—opens up 'new times' and new locations, found in the very split of ambivalent signs, wherein other cultural meanings may be located, other histories found, and ultimately other modes of political and cultural agency sought" (1999: 16).

[27] The term "affect" in the present thesis, regards the "turn to affect" brought up by the humanities in the 2000s. Combining Spinoza, Bergson, Deleuze and Sedgwick, scholars have understood affect in opposition to abstract emotions and feelings, as a combination of mind and body, "denoting "sensations, intensities, valences, attunements, dissonances, and interior movements shaped by the pressure energies, and affiliations embedded within or made part of diverse forms of embodied human life (Wehrs 3).

[28] This notion of queer temporalities, though, should not be understood as a return to the modernist opposition between subjective and objective time, meaning that different people have different experiences of time. Neither is it based on the binary opposition between local and universal. These dichotomies elevate the white and male experience to the level of generality while relegating the black or female experience to the level of individual and local (Halberstam 2005: 4).

The turn to queer temporalities claims that "time is historical by 'nature' and history demands to be understood in historicizing terms" (Edelman 2004: 181). This means that time is now understood as an epistemological phenomenon, which takes form through power relations, historical discourses, and affect. Michel Foucault (2008) and Judith Butler (1993) have helped us to imagine new ways of understanding this inseparable relationship between cultural and natural spheres, focusing on the intersection of discursive practices and bodily matters.[29] In Foucault's study of biopolitics, he explains that the body is a *locus* where diffuse forms of power take place. Following his lead, a renewed interest in the body has arisen, allowing scholars to consider the ways in which the biological is not always historical and the historical biological in its formation (Barad 2003: 809). Butler explains this process with reference to her concept of performativity. She says that "*materialization* will be a kind of citationality" of power (1993: xxiii), explaining that the temporal repetition of discursive forces makes the biological intelligible and meaningful. Following these paradigms, Elizabeth Freeman provides an insightful explanation of how "time binds" the body into ideology. She writes:

> I mean that naked flesh is bound into socially meaningful embodiment through temporal regulation: binding is what turns mere existence into a form of mastery in a process I'll refer to as *chrononormativity,* or the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity… Manipulations of time convert historically specific regimes of asymmetrical power into seemingly ordinary bodily tempos and routines, which in turn organize the value and meaning of time. (2010: 3)

[29] Foucault's *The Birth of Biopolitcs* was posthumously published, in English, in 2008.

This means that the "naked flesh" is transformed into a body via certain temporal categories (household rhythms, labor, leisure, childhood, adulthood, marriage, procreation, etc.), which frequently follow the ideal of the capitalist and heterosexual society, giving a sense of cultural belonging to the subject and, ultimately, meaning to time and life. With these underlying assumptions in mind, we can say that the field of queer temporalities has brought about many different areas of interests.[30] I understand the paradigm of queer theory is working in two ways: one group of scholars deals specifically with queer subjects and the unique ways through which this community experiences time and space, and a second group accesses the rubric of 'queer temporalities' via embodied intra-subjectivities as a queer historical method, addressing feelings and desires involved in the study of history and the relationship between subjects and the historical material (books, manuscrips, calendars, language used, etc.).

From the first group, Jack Halberstam has been a significant figure in the investigation of 'queer time' and 'queer space,' focusing on how the life of gays, lesbians, and transgender people escape such chrononormativity. *In a Queer Time and Space: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (2005), he analyzes alternative practices and spaces, in which 'strange' temporalities are materialized. For him, the concepts which ground Western civilization such as adulthood, adolescence, maturation, longevity, have the purpose of forging an association between middle-class lifecycles and "normal" and "healthy" time, while pathologizing other forms of life (4). Also Lee Edelman's influential account in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004) embraces queerness as narcissistic life, irony, and *jouissance,* negating the notion of future as procreation. He is opposed to 'future-oriented' political agendas that, at their

[30] With reference to earlier gay and lesbian studies, for example, David Halperin (1990) has also questioned whether it is even possible to write a history of homosexuality since the very category of homosexual only arose at the end of the nineteenth century.

core, reintroduce the norm of heterosexuality, an ideal of biological reproduction. He believes that "queerness names the side of those 'not fighting for the children'" (3). Implied in this point of view is the idea that narrative temporality, organized by beginning, middle, and end, reiterates the essence of hetero-normative existence in its core (Matz 231). Lee, therefore, is indirectly dialoguing with Roland Barthes (1975), Teresa de Lauretis (1984), and Peter Brook (1984) in the association between narratology and the Oedipal Complex.[31] Heather Love (2007) takes yet a different turn. She observes how the failure of the modernist project towards progress and futurity creates a feeling of backwardness in many modernist authors, who often turn their back to innovation, rationality, and technological advance, embracing nostalgia, shame, and loneliness as an alternative mode of historical identification to establish bonds across time between queer subjects. This 'negative' form of identification, she explains, transforms the paralyzing idea of loss into a productive principle to build new communities, which escape the order of reproduction and national groups.[32] One could say, therefore, that these queer scholars share a common preoccupation in questioning the notion of teleology, genealogical continuity, patriarchy, and the family models. It is quite clear, though, that queer subjects do not exclusively defy linearity. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Henri Bergson (1889), Walter Benjamin (2007 [1942]) and T.S Eliot (1998 [1921]) had already questioned the notion of causality in history and literature. The contribution of these queer temporalities scholars, I argue, is in combining the epistemological study of time with sexuality and gender, problematizing the key categories that have guided the West—like progress and

[31] See *Ada: Queering Postmodernism and Narratology,* in the present thesis, for a more detailed analysis of the intersection between hetero-normativity and the general structure of the narrative.

[32] Sarah Ahmed expounds upon the dazzling temporality that feminist politics produces, writing: "[w]e make things bigger just by refusing to make things smaller. You experience the world on a different scale" (40).

national calendars—in the light of desire, affect, and eroticism.[33] This first group is a source of inspiration to the present thesis in as much as Nabokov himself performs a certain backwardness in his novels as well as demonstrates a clear anxiety toward the future, often turning 'negative' feelings, like reparative nostalgia, shame, and grievance, into sources of aesthetic power.

The second group, however, which accesses the rubric of 'queer temporalities' via embodied intra-subjectivities, provides in more detail the frame through which I will address Nabokov's works. Queerness here regards a method, a way of thinking of history and time. In the queer method, historical eventfulness (usually negative events like war, death, weddings, possessions, etc.) gives space to the positive intra-subjective dynamics that also guide the traditional program of history but have been silenced in the name of scientific objectivity. They want to reintroduce the body and affect as a valid method of historiographical study, focusing on how physical contact and pleasures also raise new historical content in opposition to the traditional method of history based on objective analysis and detached sight.

In *Getting Medieval* (1999), Dinshaw explains how history is moved by bodily encounters, what she calls a "queer historical impulse" (21). Following the model of Roland Barthes and Jules Michelet, Dinshaw understands that "history is profoundly embodied and deeply desirous" (46) because it enacts via texts, citation, documents, photography, and archives "physicality of the historical contact" (51). She examines how people are moved by ideas, texts, and theories also because they establish a pleasurable and phantasmagoric connection with them (51). She observes this same form of "tactile history" in Michel Foucault's research at the *Bibliotheque Nationale*

[33] For more on the parallels between the novel and genealogy, see Patricia Drechsel Tobin, *Time and the Novel: The Genealogical Imperative* (1978).

when he repetitively says that he felt "an intensity" or "vibration" reading about other lives, which marks his desire for contact across death with other queer subjects (34).

Elizabeth Freeman's *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities and Queer Histories* (2010) also focuses on an "affective history." Following Dipesh Chakrabarty and Pierre Bourdieu, instead of Barthes and Foucault, she pays more attention to the micro-temporalities inside the body,

> [T]hinking that a bodily motion (a grasp, a clutch, a refusal to let go) might have something to do with knowing and making history with continuities, contacts, and contradictions among past, present and future through both physical sensations and emotional response. (xx)

Freeman observes how the body works as a "method of literally *feeling* the historical," resembling Dinshaw's queer impulses (93). Drawing from an eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century notion of 'sentimental history,' she observes how the "fantasy of rubbing up against the past" returns in the twentieth century as an erotic and homosocial pleasure to touch the text of history as a sexual act (xii). I will argue that Nabokov's late work is a good example of this erotic return and that he uses the body "as a tool to effect, figure, or perform that encounter" with history (95). Freeman calls this process "erotohistoriography." In her words:

> Erotohistoriography admits that contact with historical materials can be precipitated by particular bodily dispositions, and that these connections may elicit bodily responses, even pleasurable ones, that are themselves a form of understanding. It sees the body as method, and historical consciousness as something intimately involved with corporeal sensations. (95-96)

In Freeman's method, touch and texture gain particular attention because they mediate the encounter between bodies and texts. In the next chapters, I will address this and

other concepts from the field of queer temporalities to the understanding of Nabokov's work.[34]

1.4 Ada: Queering Postmodernism and Narratology

If modernism offered a privileged place of investigation for queer studies, postmodernism seems to encapsulate the very essence of queerness, assuming that queer "refers to nonnormative logics" (Halberstam 2005: 6). The postmodernist crisis between form and meaning—manifested by chaotic fluidities, obscurity of language, and experiments with time—created an opportunity and a critical language that made the very concept of queer more intelligible. In other words, postmodernism offered a repertoire to the queer denaturalization of epistemologies—time, embodiment, sexuality, gender, and identity. In Brenda Longfellow's words:

> [T]he odd thing about the entry of the body into postmodernism discourse, however, is the extent to which the body is all too often staged only to be made to disappear: the body, tantalizingly absent and present, desired and lost in a theoretical fort/da game... The body is mediated and refashioned through technique, emerging wholly as an extension of technology and information processing" (180).

As one can see, the very fluidity of queerness is at the center of the postmodernist play between seen/hidden, and technology becomes a key element to make the body visible, which can also be claimed in regard to the body of time. So, postmodernist experimentations helped us to imagine the ways in which queerness became possible.

Samuel Becket's *Waiting for Godot* (1953), once viewed as a description of an all-male world, empties the capitalist notion of progress as a linear continuum, putting

[34] For more on the study of affect and touch, see *The book of Touch,* edited by Constance Classen (2005) and David Howes, "The Skinscape: Reflections on the Dermatological Turn" (2018).

into question linear narrative time in itself, but the alienating experience lived by the major characters can be considered a parody to the social polarisation imposed on homosexual couples (Boxall 2004). Samuel R. Delany's transgender embodiments in *Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand* (1984) imagine non-linear histories and futures for sex and gender for black communities (Nyong'o 2019). Thomas Pynchon, who often explores male sexual fantasies in his novels, seems to play with self-reflexive language and the blur between reality and imagination to contradict gender expectations and their typical power dynamics (Chetwynd, Freer, Maragos 2018). To sum up in somewhat sweeping terms, if modernism has internalized a crisis on male and female identities, Postmodernism explores this crisis in more ironic and playful ways, bringing to the surface a critique of our binary systems: male and female, imagination and reality, form and content.

In terms of narrative time, these postmodernist experimentations put into question the opposition between discourse and diegesis and one scholarly opinion that there must be only an "ideal" and a "real" world in the Platonic sense.[35] M.M. Bakhtin (1981 [1937]) invoked Albert Einstein's discoveries to call this into question, defending more complex ways through which time and space in literature are entangled.[36] He calls these 'clusters of space-time' chronotopes, explaining that they help to define the conventional structure of genres and the "image of man in literature as well" (84-85). In the context of intertextual studies, Julia Kristeva (1980 [1969]) and Susan Stanford

[35] Ever since Tzvetan Todorov (1971) and Paul Ricoeur (1983) described narrative in terms of time, this discursive model has been characterized as a sequence of events, mirroring the pragmatic and temporal experience of reading sentence after sentence, but the concept of narrative has not always been strictly circumscribed to temporal change. In classical literature, the narrative was defined by the presence of the mediating authority, the narrator. More recently, cognitive narratology focuses on mental states that can provide the capacity to form narratives, for example. For more on the definition of narrative, see Wolf Schmid, *Narratology: An Introduction* (2010); *New Approaches to Narrative: Cognition, Culture, and History* (2013), edited by Vera Nünning.

[36] See Jonathan Stone's article on Bakhtin and Einstein, "Polyphony and the Atomic Age: Bakhtin's Assimilation of an Einsteinian Universe" (2008).

Friedman (1993) readdressed Bakhtin's chronotopes, suggesting that the text contains two different axes, one horizontal and one vertical, that intersect with each other in a procedural negotiation of meaning. The horizontal axis, explains Friedman, "involves the linear movement of the characters through the coordinates of textual space and time," while the vertical "involves the space and time [that] the writer and reader occupy as they inscribe and interpret … the text and its dialogue with literary, social and historical intertexts" (14).[37]

Postmodernist literature, however, complicates time by different means. It is not merely a combination of vertical and horizontal axes, pointing to the existence of unstable ontological worlds. Instead, postmodernist literature poses an unresolvable clash between different systems of epistemology and ontology, which might complement, contradict, endure, or break apart from each other. This means that the classical dichotomies between vertical and horizontal (mimetic time and fictional time, discourse and diegesis), which have until recently marked the study of narrative time, are insufficient to explain the complex ways temporalities are negotiated. [38]

If we apply this postmodernist-queer approach to understand Nabokov's *Ada, or Ardor,* new readings come to the surface. While the novel's discursive level generates different styles and genres (Arcadian, pastoral, modern cinematography, scientific essays) frequently modulating its tempo by the personality of the characters, the biological time of the protagonists moves progressively toward death, following the

[37] Friedman claims that, when consciously intended by the writer, such vertical layers of palimpsests "do not usually exist in the mind of the characters—in the space time of the horizontal narrative" (16).

[38] This encounter of ontological and epistemological spheres, explains Karen Barad, have brought up a shift from the idea of representability into performativity: "[t]he relationship between the material and the discursive is one of mutual entailment. Neither is articulated/articulable in the absence of the other; matter and meaning are mutually articulated. Neither discursive practices nor material phenomena are ontologically or epistemologically prior. Neither can be explained in terms of the other. Neither has a privileged status in determining the other" (2003: 822). Carolyn Dinshaw confirms this, saying that this unbridled circulation of spheres is both a symptom and a result of a broader deconstruction of the body as an innate separation between both sexes (1999: 42-43).

line of the text toward the end. In terms of affect, though, the text is marked by an obsessive attraction to the past, which can be embraced nostalgically or delineated pathologically. Antiterra combines fifteenth-century voyages of discovery and twentieth-century space exploration. The insertions of new physics imagery (rockets, atoms, and black holes) project the novel into futurity, dramatically clashing this futurity against the pastoral atmosphere and the nineteenth-century domestic household system. The linearity of historical time is particularly convoluted, shifting back and forth according to the time of the reader. The Protagonist explains:

> [A] gap of up to a hundred years one way or another existed between the two earths; a gap marked by a bizarre confusion of directional signs at the crossroads of passing time with not *all* the no-longers of one world corresponding to the not-yets of the other (*Ada* 21).

In this somewhat chaotic computation of time, one might conclude that *Ada, or Ardor* pushes the reader to negotiate between conflicting spheres, inside and outside the text. Temporality in the novel is, therefore, a conundrum, intentionally problematized to make sure the reader has to reconcile different "collapsing" times (*Ada* 32). This spatialization of different temporalities pushes the narrative either forward or backward, upward into the future or downward into the present, inverting or enlarging time and space in the novel.[39]

Observing these manipulations of story time, Anne Zeller describes *Ada, or Ardor* as a spiral or as a Möbius strip: "[t]he reader can see that the periods of separation

[39] Nabokov was particularly interested in spatial configurations and, as a professor, often made use of maps to explain details of the plot. In *Lecture on Literature,* he laid out Mansfield Park, Gregor Samsa's house, the itineraries of Bloom in *Ulysses,* and the façade of Dr. Jekyll's abode, demonstrating a "spatializing impulse" in his approach to literature (Barrows 94). Van Veen, however, condemns space as the fraud and villain of his story, signaling the difference between the author and his character.

have a certain rhythm: four years, four years, twelve years, seventeen years" (287). [40] She interprets this repetition as a spiral, saying that "[t]hese recurrent events line up vertically on the spiral so that just below the present is the past and below that an even more distant past, etc." (282). This impulse to define the novel as a spiral is fully comprehensible. Nabokov had himself expressed his appreciation for this "spiritualized circle" as one that liberates history from vicious repetitions (*SM* 209). Marijeta Bozovic, though, establishes a parallel between *Ada* and Zeno's paradox, observing how the chapters of the novel proportionally shrink, concluding that the protagonist wants to overcome the arrow of time (222). I believe, however, that one should completely avoid the tendency to search for a single format or metaphor for *Ada,* and accept the multiplicity of temporalities and its encounters.

Gérard Genette's categories also have to be left aside. In his seminal analysis (1980) of Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time,* Genette assumes mimetic Newtonian time as the backdrop of the novel (Richardson 2002: 47), avoiding any problem that might arise in the encounter between narrative time and non-linear formats of time. Genette's theory is therefore unsuitable for analyses of postmodern narratives in which time breaks free from teleology, or when questions of desire and non-normative sexuality call into question the very notion of narrative progress.

To fill this theoretical gap, postmodern narratologists have suggested different categories that are frequently in dialogue with models borrowed from the new physics. To name just a few, there are: circular, contradictory, antinomic, differential, conflated, dual, and multiple time (Richardson 2002); layering, flickering, embedding, wormholing, sidestepping, and collapsing time (Gomel 2014); and forking loops,

[40] For more on Nabokov and spiral form, see Daniel Hughes, "Nabokov: Spiral and Glass" (1968); L. L. Lee, "Vladimir Nabokov's Great Spiral of Being" (1964); Marina Grishakova, *The Models of Space, Time and Vision in V. Nabokov's Fiction* (2012), specifically chapter two.

repetitions, contradictions, omissions, and inversions (Heise 1997).[41] Influenced by these postmodernist theorists, a subcategory of narratology, called "unnatural narratology" has recently focused on texts that project a non-mimetic world—humanly, physically, and logically impossible—focusing not only in postmodern texts, but also medieval dreams narratives and gothic novels.[42] These approaches emphasize non-conventional forms of time and space in literature, also failing, however, to address questions of desire.

The field of queer temporalities shares with these postmodern narratologists a concern with experiences outside linear (Newtonian and hetero-normative) systems, notably inserting affect and desire as one of the primary traces of the study of literary temporalities. Roland Barthes (1975), Teresa de Lauretis (1984), and Peter Brooks (1984) had already cleared the way for investigating the parallels between psychoanalysis and temporal narrative development, saying that "narrative structuring capacity" follows Oedipal logic (de Lauretis

125-128). In a nutshell, this means that narrative is guided by male linearity; it is goal-oriented, but interrupted by a passive, circular, and feminine time that detains actions.[43] The new turn to queer theory in narratology, though, is less preoccupied with the re-inscription of the notion that the sex-binary drives the narrative, and instead focuses on how Foucauldian poststructuralist historiography has broken the "discourse of the

[41] Richard Brian studies the violations of realistic time that arise in the relationship between discourse and story time. Elana Gomel focuses mainly on the social and political meaning of distorting time and space. Ursula Heise analyzes specific works to explore how time has been manipulated in the postmodern tradition. In all these scholars, eroticism, desire and bodily experiences of time are absent.

[42] For more on "unnatural narratives" see Brian Richardson, "Beyond Story and Discourse: Narrative Time in Postmodern and Nonmimetic Fiction" (2002); *Postclassical Narratology: Approaches and Analyses,* ed. by Jan Alber and Monika Fludernik (2010); *Poetics of Unnatural Narrative,* ed. by Jan Alber, Henrik Skov and Brian Richardson (2013); and *Beyond Classical Narration: Transmedial and Unnatural Challenges,* ed. by Jan Alber and Per Krogh Hansen (2014).

[43] Elizabeth Freeman explains that normative temporalities (inside the order of (re)production and traditional family) entail an ability to narrate in terms of "state-sanctioned" forms, which are "event-centered, goal-orientated, intentional, and culminating in epiphanies, or major transformations." (2010: 5)

continuous" (Dinshaw 1999: 15). [44] This means that instead of focusing on the opposition between feminine and masculine modes, queer theory is more interested in problematizing fundamental categories that have organized our notion of narrative: the concept of progress, continuity, lineage, goal, and climax, combining the study of narrative time with political issues or intra-subjective drives[45]

According to Warhol and Lanser, gender and queer studies fundamentally shifts narratology into intersectionality, taken to mean an overlapping approach to subjects, plots, and practices (12). This marks the end of Theory in the name of a "critically affirmative bricolage" in the narrative analysis (Breger 345). Coykendall calls this the turn from 'narratology' to 'narrative theory,' as a more suitable rubric for today's "intellectually porous landscape" (332). The 'queer(ing) of narratology' thus avoids the rigid classification of temporal and spatial structures, typical of the structuralist approach, helping to think about temporal affects involved in specific literary relationships. Following the paradigms of 'queer narratology,' one might wonder: Why is an author revivifying one model of time and space instead of another? Are these

[44] Since the 1980s, feminists have been trying to include gender as a category of narratology, redirecting the generalist aspect of structuralist analysis and the search for universal models. These feminists move toward a historically contingent discussion of narrative that also takes desire, sex, and sexuality into account. However, 'feminist narratology' has been criticized for re-introducing the notion of an essential binary distinction between female and male, and also for emphasizing sexuality more than issues related to the fluidity of gender. In this vein, feminist narratology has returned to Roland Barthes, who explains that telling stories is searching for one's origins, which implies a return for the father and a desire to enter history (1975). Peter Brook associates narrative with identity, saying that both organize meaning as genealogy, i.e., as a sequence of events organized by cause and consequence (1984). Queer(ing) narratology, on the other hand, avoids the strict separation of sexes, drawing an implication of sexuality and desire for narrative analysis in a more "diverse effulgence of non-normative identifications" (McCabe 120-121). See *Narrative Theory Unbound: Queer and Feminist Interventions* (2015), edited by Susan S. Lanser and Robyn Warhol; Susan S. Lanser's "Sexing the Narrative: Propriety, Desire, and the Engendering of Narratology" (1995).

[45] Elizabeth Freeman explains that the field of queer temporalities questions not only "'history' proper but also coming out, consummation, development, domesticity, foreplay, genealogy, identity, liberation, modernity, the progress of movements—all key concepts for gays and lesbians as well as other social justice projects and theories, and all which take their meaning from, and contribute to, a vision of time as seamless, unified, and forward moving" (xxii).

temporal and spatial disruptions also felt in sexual, social, and racial relationships? Are these temporal models disrupting heteronormativity?

In my study of *Ada, or Ardor,* I will combine postmodern narratology and queer temporalities in order to follow Nabokov's idiosyncratic merger of new physics imagery and eroticism in the novel. For me, Nabokov entails an erotic exploration of new physics imagery, reintroducing the erotic body as a method to feel time. This interpretation ultimately diverges from the common-sense idea that *Ada* is a defense of time as memory and consciousness. [46]

This odd intersection of eroticism and new physics is, obviously, not unique to Nabokov's work.[47] The sub-genre of queer science fiction, especially popular in the 1950s and 1960s, around the same time Nabokov was writing *Ada,* has also explored new forms of sexuality in other social and physical universes. Pouls Anderson's *Virgen Planets* (1959) explores polyamory in an exclusively female world. Samuel Delany imagines a new gender and a new sexual orientation in "Aye, and Gomorra" (1967). Ursula K. Le Guin (1969) and Issac Assimov (1972) designed new forms of sexuality between humans and aliens. In their speculations, these authors frequently point to the fact that sexuality is a social construction that, not necessarily, follows the linearity of conventional time and heterosexuality, also exploring technologies as a source of pleasure.[48] In other words, queer science-fictional texts challenge "the technologies of compulsory heterosexuality" by imagining "alternative ways of living in the world as a

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[46] See *Introduction*.

[47] I have observed that queer scholars, in their attempt to search for alternative forms of temporalities, have loosely engaged with a vocabulary derived from new physics. As a researcher, Karen Barad is probably the most consciously invested in explaining how queer temporality relates to quantum physics. She writes: "[t]here is no smooth temporal (or spatial) topology connecting beginning and end. Each scene diffracts various temporalities, iteratively differentiating-entangling, within and across, the field of spacetime mattering" (2010: 244). In this vein, Lee Edelman remarks that there is a "queerness of time's refusal to submit to a temporal logic—or, better, the distortion of that logic by the interference, like a gravitational pull, of some other, unrecognized force" (2007: 188).

[48] For more on science- iction, queer theory and time, see *Queer Universes: Sexualities in Science-Fiction,* edited by Gordon et al. (2008).

sexual/ized subject" (Gordon et al. 6). They start from the premise that the very categories of time and space are sexualized and that imagining other forms of time and space might likewise forge new forms of sexuality and vice-versa.

Although Nabokov is not as experimental as the authors mentioned above, he also explores how non-normative temporalities (like layering, embedding, rewinding, and forking paths) might be particularly pleasurable to the characters. Nabokov, like his protagonist, clearly communicates a desire to manipulate time. The novel, however, is not a matter of imagining new physical worlds and genders, but actually of exploring the parallels between the eroticized body and the rupture with linearity.[49] Postmodern temporalities, with their multiple encounters and free plays, liberate people from the dull temporality of the labor work and the seemingly emptied timelessness of the household, generating new encounters, awakening dormant sensibilities, and the pleasure of novelty (Freeman 2010: 53).

1.5 Coda: Nabokov' Sexualized Tradition

During the 1920s and 1930s, Nabokov published nine novels, all under the pen name of V. Sirin. The critical response to his work was mixed but fruitful. The critics that expressed distaste for Sirin denounced his novels as "imitations," and even called him an "impostor," emphasizing how Nabokov has made too much use of other authors' devices and themes (Page 6). [50]

[49] The analysis of new physics and queer temporalities, in *Ada,* foregrounds only my own 'will to knowledge,' unearthing the temporalities I desire to follow, while 'others' remain silent in the meantime.
[50] Yet, paradoxically, the main accusation was that Nabokov betrayed his Russianness (ibid.).More recently, the attacks on Nabokov's 'anti-Russianness' found a daunting sense of renovation when, in 2012, the director of the Nabokovian Museum, Tatyana Ponomareva, received an email from the "Cossacks of Saint Petersburg," a radical nationalist group. The email suggests the institution should be relocated to another place in the outskirts of the town in order to clear the city from, "Satan, depravity, and violence" According to Michael Idov's article in *The New Yorker* (2013), "Nabokov is everything the country is being told to hate right now: a liberal…an elitist; an emigrant..an unrelenting meritocrat; and above all, a Russian who defies the idea of Russianness" (Idov 2013).

In order to understand Nabokov's controversial approach to Russian literary tradition, Dolinin classifies Nabokov's dialogue with his predecessors as a three-tier intertextual strategy: "continuation (of classical and neoclassical poetic idiom), amelioration (of the nineteenth-century realist novel), and mocking parody (of influential contemporary trends)" (2005: 62). This, according to Dolinin, made Nabokov "the most literary-minded Russian prose writer of the twentieth-century" (ibid.).

Of these three, Nabokov's "mocking parody" of other writers has often stood out. Simon Karlinsky explains that, in the 1930s, Nabokov's originality was often seen as a "mask covering up his indifference to his fellow humans" (1970: 10). Jean-Paul Sartre, for example, (1982[1939)] claimed that Nabokov borrowed the devices from Dostoevsky simply in order to "poke fun at them" (66). According to Sartre, in doing so, Nabokov had lost his way. "If Mr. Nabokov is so superior to the novels he writes, why does he write them?" he asks, adding "I could swear that he was impelled to do so by a masochistic impulse" (ibid.), making Sartre one of the first to give a psychosexual interpretation to Nabokov's convoluted relationship with other authors. Later, Edmund Wilson confirms Nabokov's sadistic tendencies: "[o]ne knows also the perversity of [Nabokov's] tricks to startle or stick pins in the reader…[a]side from the desire both to suffer and make suffer" (*AY* 493).

In 1989, Richard Rorty published a seminal analysis on Nabokov's cruelty, saying that he teaches the reader by showing them the "effect of our private idiosyncrasies on others" instead of showing "the effects of social practices and institutions" on others (144). For Rorty, Nabokov combines aestheticism and morality, showing to the "liberal ironist intellectual" the cruelty present in the search for autonomy or aesthetic bliss (ibid.).

Maurice Couturier (1999) and Leland de la Durantye (2007) continue this investigation, observing how Nabokov's cruelty is present not only in the plot but also in regard to the readers. More recently, in [NABOKV-L], an online discussion group dedicated to Nabokovian specialists, Joseph Aisenberg makes an interesting note regarding Nabokov's willpower. He states that Nabokov positions the reader as the "author's dysfunctional children, expected to ignore the parent's contradictions, forced to deny what we read with our own eyes (…) because otherwise we're calling him a liar, and nobody wants to do that" ("The name of L*lita... Occam's Razor?", online posting).[51] Eric Naiman (2010) coins the term "hermophobia" to describe the "state of affairs" readers often experience while tackling Nabokov: a mix of admiration and submission, transgression and obedience, fear of exposure and humiliation (126). Any reader of Nabokov, explains Naiman, must be ready to engage in the author's "monolithic authorial intent" or be prepared to overcome the "fear of inadequacy" (128). For Naiman, Nabokov projected his anxiety of influence onto his reader: "[a] good reader of Nabokov reads queerly, warily, with a strange mixture of aggression and submission, lashing out at his colleges while fearing and welcoming the attentions of an author who thinks the best readers allow themselves to be taken from behind" (131). Investigating the same writer-reader dynamic pointed out by Naiman, Michael Rodgers (2016) concludes that Nabokov establishes a master-slave relationship with his reader. Nabokov, he writes, "provoke[s] the reader into resisting both his works and his authorial persona." In disempowering Nabokov, his readers become better interpreters (58)[52].

[51] NABOKV-L is a discussion and information sharing-forum devoted to Nabokovian specialists and readers in general.

[52] Even Nabokov's scientific writings have been characterized by a sexualized approach. In 2000, Boyd and Robert Michael Pyle made public, for the first time, a selection of Nabokov's technical writings. In the introduction to the volume, Boyd recounted two relevant aspects of Nabokov's scientific practice.

Clearly, Nabokov has problems accepting his family tradition, which manifests itself as an issue of bonding and penetration: an abjection to how "minor" authors penetrate his own works, or to allow some "good" readers to penetrate his writings. Curiously enough, these family issues are common in his plots too. Whether because of adultery (*King, Queen, Knave*; *The Eye*; *Despair*; *Laughter in the Dark*; *Pnin*), madness (*The Defense*; *Transparent Things*), or perverse desires (*The Enchanter*; *Lolita*; *Look at the Harlequins!*) nearly every family in Nabokov's novels falls apart. The few 'happy' families (*Pale Fire*; *Invitation to a Beheading; Ada, or Ardor*) either lose their offspring abruptly or are infertile, demonstrating his anxiety in regard to the future. One could say that Nabokov's critique of the family also occurs in terms of the "family romance," simultaneously placing himself within a genealogy of great male authors and yet contested this patriarchal model. He reinforced a feeling of cultural belonging with the authors he loved, rejecting the ones he did not like in a selective model. In a famous interview, he says:

> There is hardly a single Russian major writer of the past whom pigeonholers have not mentioned in connection with me. Pushkin's blood runs through the veins of modern Russian literature as inevitably as Shakespeare's through those of English literature […] When I was young I liked Poe, and I still love Melville, whom I did not read as a boy. My feelings towards James [Joyce] are rather complicated. I really dislike him intensely but now and then the figure of a phrase, the turn of the epithet, the screw of an absurd adverb, cause me a kind of electric tingle, as if some current of his was also passing through my own blood. (*SO* 63-64)

First, he stressed the fact that Nabokov had dissected butterflies' genitalia with the same "thrill" as he had explored the sexual content of his novels.

There are many narratives of the 'literary family' to disentangle here. On the one hand, Nabokov evinces a filial adoration for Pushkin and Shakespeare, who are, according to him, omnipresent in the literary system; on the other, he expresses his desire to be an independent author, above any cultural inheritance. His responses to certain authors and literary devices are physiological as much as they are intellectual.[53] Between narratives of transcendence, tradition and blood ties, one might say that Nabokov has 'queered' his literary family, questioning the validity of the nomenclature of filial subordination to paternal authority in the name of a system of elective and organic lineage. Observing these contradictions, Michael Darnell (2016) claims that, in this tension between continuity and independence, Nabokov's overtly intertextual novels convey a sense of literary belonging and yet simultaneously question the meaning of loyal affiliation, ironically manipulating the devices, themes, and techniques of his forbearers (19-24).[54]

Nabokov's troubled relationship to his literary fathers clearly follows Harold Bloom's "anxiety of influence" (1997[1973]) theory of literary relationships. Nabokov expresses "a skepticism for the categories of filiation" at the same time that he embraces them (Darnell 23), and his struggle to overcome the European literary tradition is transparent, as one can see in some of his demining comments about his precursors, acknowledged or unacknowledged, like Joyce, Dostoevsky, and Bunin (*SO* 42-43).[55]

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[53] Judith Roof provides an interesting interpretation of such a problem. Without referencing Nabokov directly, she observes that, in the shift from Foucault's "deployment of family" to the "deployment of sexuality," a new form of pleasure arises in the middle. "A *jouissance* of disruption," she explains, "not unlike Barthes' division between the Oedipal pleasure of cultural acquiescence and the perverse pleasure of that which disturbs it" (37). In this context, Nabokov's proliferation of family stories and blood connections projects a desire for rupture from the normative system of family and genealogy.

[54] If one bears in mind Dolinin's analysis that Nabokov had a triadic model of parody—reverencing the classical and neoclassical poems, ameliorating the nineteenth century, and mocking the contemporary authors (2005: 62) — then it becomes clear how complex Nabokov's familial symbolism is going beyond mere affiliation and devotion.

[55] Maxim D. Shrayer, expounding upon Nabokov's relationship with Bunin, says that both authors nurtured a strong rivalry that changed from respectful admiration to disdainful appraisal over the years (1999: 241). Shrayer states that when Nabokov became more famous than his predecessor, Bunin reacted to "Nabokov's writing as vehemently as he did because he saw in them a son who looks more like the neighbor across the hall than like his own father" (341).

Harold Bloom's literary romance, like Nabokov himself, defends a format of literary creation based on the dispute between authors, simultaneously projecting a male homosocial desire (Sedgwick 1985: 2). Both, Nabokov and Bloom, imply a homoerotic relationship between men that transforms the female merely into a symbolic tool to access masculinity. Bloom writes:

> Primal Scene, for a poet as poet? It is his Poetic Father's coitus with the Muse. There he was begotten? No−there they failed to beget him. He must be self-begotten, he must engender himself upon the Muse his mother. But the muse is as pernicious as the Sphinx or Covering Cherub, and may identify herself with either, though more usually with the Sphinx. The strong poet fails to beget himself, he must wait for his son, who will define him even as he has defined his own poetical Father. (37)

Bloom not only imagines these literary relations solely in terms of a male dispute, but, as Colleen Lamos explains, this Freudian system repeats the "psychoanalytic accounts of the constitution of adult male subjectivity as purchased at the price of repression of feminine affects and pre-oedipal desires" (3).[56] It is evident thus that Bloom and Nabokov project an allure of queerness in their literary narrative of development, although they do not acknowledge such tendency. In this token, Bloom writes that "memory, in Nabokov, fears not so much Oedipal intensities as it does more-than-Oedipal genealogies" (1987: 2),[57] suggesting that Nabokov would like to erase

[56] In the preface to the English translation to *The Gift* (1938), Nabokov also makes a similar statement, saying that the "heroine [of the book] is not Zina, but Russian Literature," clearly transforming the feminine figure into an abstract symbol. In the sequence, he lists his fatherly sources (Pushkin, Gogol, Chernyshevski) (ii), erasing any trace of femininity from his genealogy.

[57] Harold Bloom's "anxiety of influence" is based on sexual and negative drives between men (1997[1973]): 37). Such antagonistic feelings can be read, though, as plain envy, jealousy, or heartburn between authors; or as a positive endeavor to propel literature by 'dialogic challenge,' 'mutual admiration,' and 'positive encouragement.' In his exam on Latin and Greek *imitation*, D.A. Russel explains that Seneca and Philodermus conceived *aemulatio* as a positive strategy. For them, it was a device of literary improvement, contributing to poetical excellence and, therefore, it was not to be seen with despair or agony (4). For Dionysus of Halicarnassus and Quintilian, *imitatio* corrects the faults of

genealogical dependency from his work as a trace of subordination—a characteristic conventionally associated with women.

Nevertheless, Nabokov shares with queer specialists the need to "grapple with the meaning of intergenerational dialogue outside the frameworks of conflict and mandatory continuity" (Halberstam 2005: 210). Queer (particularly queer-feminist) studies have also critiqued the application of the model of "family," "generations" or "waves" to intellectual transmission, observing, for example, the brutal cultural ruptures between second- and third-wave feminism.[58] However, if one invalidates the nomenclature of debt, burden, and authority, what alternative forms of kinship can Nabokov and queer studies provide?

In *Families We Choose* (1991), Kath Weston replaces blood ties with consensual affiliation as the basis for kinship.[59] Because of Nabokov's expatriation, which entailed the loss of his family, the distance from his homeland, and a change in languages, this sort of "willingness" becomes a condition *sine qua non* for his family lineage.[60] In suggesting that kinship is organized by affinity instead of debt Nabokov's literary family romance reflects a practice that becomes relatable for any feminist and

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the original text through interpretation and agency, disregarding the anxiety in the terms that Bloom proposes (6). Nabokov's familial relationship with tradition can also be interpreted in light of the Russian Formalist scenario in which a preoccupation with literary evolution gained much attention, not as a psychoanalytical relationship, but regarding the evolution of the device (Tynjanov 1975[1921]).

[58] For the critique of the model of generation, see Dana Heller's "The Anxiety of Affluence: Movements, Markets, and Lesbian Feminist Generation(s)" (1997).

[59] Gayle Rubin inaugurates this reflection upon alternative forms of kinship in "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex" (1975), where she questions the universality of the law of incest taboo in structuralist theories, specifically those of Lévi-Strauss and Jacques Lacan. Readdressing the arguments of Marx and Engels, Rubin points out the importance of women in the political economy of sex, denaturalizing affection within nuclear families and situating the family romance as a social construction that exists for economic reasons. In *Antigone's Claim* (2000), Judith Butler also casts doubt on Freud's and Lacan's formulation of the Oedipus complex by arguing that desire is radically conditioned, but not radically determined. Antigone's claim upsets the language of kinship, confounding the love for the brother with love for the father. In doing so, Antigone indirectly creates space for other structures of affections, which can be intelligible outside the norm of Oedipal love (22).

[60] In *The Marriage Plot* (2016), Naomi Seidman expounds upon literary transmission between women, explaining that female writers need to forge their matrilineal lineage in literature, establishing the precursors by "discovery" rather than by inheritance (247).

queer subject who is divided between the cultural importance of the Oedipal myth and the political necessity of overcoming this model.

In *The Gift* (1938), Nabokov takes the exploration of elective families to a new level, mingling tradition, blood connection, and erotic attachment with his forebears. This exploration might be interesting to queer subjects as an alternative to filial dependency and, although his system is androcentric, it is nevertheless experimental in the way it projects multiple lines of affiliation.

One must bear in mind that *The Gift* is a novel organized around the presence of spectral paternal figures.[61] These father figures, only male ones, help the protagonist in his personal development as a writer: Pushkin represents the poetical father; Konstantin Kirillovich is the biological one; and Chernyshevsky, the oppositional father (or the father of others), who pushes the protagonist into intellectual independence. There is a whole chapter dedicated to Fyodor's biological father. Fyodor attempts to continue Konstantin's works, digging through his scientific writings like an archeologist, while reading the works of his poetical father, Pushkin. He wants to reconstruct his biological father through a symbolic one:

> Pushkin entered his blood. With Pushkin's voice merged the voice of his father. He kissed Pushkin's hot little hand…From Pushkin's prose he passed to his life, so that in the beginning the rhythm of Pushkin's era commingle with the rhythm of his father's life. (*TG* 98)

[61] I owe some of these ideas about paternal lineage to Michael Darnell, who explains that, in Nabokov's works, "absent fathers, false fathers, and overbearing parents reflect a preoccupation with cultural continuity and the struggle for personal autonomy. Their depictions of their foreign characters as unfit sexual partners answer anxieties about cultural commingling. And the discrediting of new fatherhood implies unwillingness, or even an inability, to fulfill expected narratives of American normalcy. In each of these themes, we recognize a complex relationship with the psycholinguistic law of the father, and its pre-eminence in national identity and tradition" (7-8).

In this rather sensual encounter, Nabokov's own admiration for Pushkin becomes clear, as he makes Fyodor kiss Pushkin's hand, expressing his intellectual gratification through his character. Not without a hint of erotic adoration, Nabokov emphasizes here affect and poetical preferences.[62]

Along the novel, Fyodor gives up the project with his father's spectral figure to follow his own creative voice, thus abandoning his filial struggle to pursue an independent career. Nevertheless, Nabokov continues this project in *Father's Butterflies* (1939), an addendum to the novel written one year later. The addendum, in Nabokov's own words, is suspended around the novel like "a small satellite," attaching another circular form to the already existing circularity of the novel (*FB* 198).[63] In this excerpt, Fyodor finally responds to his fathers (the biological and poetical ones), assembling them in a single and singular text that mingles their voices with Fyodor's own. *Father's Butterflies* foreclosed yet another form of literary development based on metaphysical continuation. In a dreamlike scene, the protagonist overhears the words his father whispers to an anonymous interlocutor, words that might be the confusing

[62] This idea of intellectual blending goes even further. It also appears on the authorial level. Irina Paperno (1992), Dieter Zimmer and Sabine Hartmann (2002/2003) all observe how Nabokov copies nineteenth-century travel diaries from explorers on Central Asia expeditions, introducing selected passages from these sources into Chapter Two. In Nabokov's own process of writings, he blends, therefore, a literary homage to Pushkin with scientific texts, suggesting that he is reinventing his literary-genetic code, precisely like Fyodor did, by the selection and introduction of others texts into his writings.

[63] Alexander Dolinin investigates the idea of literary evolution by leaps in Nabokov's work, which is another alternative model to Bloom's family romance. Aligning the author with Vladislav Khodasevich, Dolinin argues that both Nabokov and Khodasevich believe the tradition is an incessant movement of change that manifests in recurrent flashes and explosions (2005: 57). Implicit in this language of "explosion" and "fire" is the idea of sudden innovations in a system that accumulates novelty by pressing innovations against old features until transformations suddenly occur. These jumps in evolution eliminate the mechanical sequence of events (cause and consequence) and, by extension, disrupt the importance of genealogical or national systems for the development of literature. Quentin Anderson associates Nabokov's famous patterns in time with "light anthropomorphic," claiming that Nabokov's novels possess something that "is wholly inimical to our gross appetite for stories of growth, development, [and] sequential change" (7). This model has a lot in common with Bergson's notion of duration and time as magnitude, as, for the French philosopher, time is measured not by isolated events, but by the continuum's accumulation of the past as intensity and quality (1889: 90). Vladimir E. Alexandrov sees Nabokov's "abrupt changes" as a variant of Ernst Haeckel and Lamarckism, "with typical emphasis on the idea of sudden leaps of awareness… perceptual and cognitive leaps, rather than the result of prior organic evolution that creates the material base or potential of these leaps" (1995: 243).

book he has just written (*FB* 234), suggesting that he has been able to finish the text because of an intervention from the otherworld. In this vein, Richard Rorty claims that Nabokov "is sure that there is a connection between the immortality of the work and the person who creates the work—between aesthetics and metaphysics, to put it crudely" (150).

At another moment, Fyodor explores his antagonism with Chernyshevsky, whom he identifies as the father of Soviet materialism, which Fyodor wishes to criticize. In order to attack Chernyshevsky's rationalism, Nabokov combines documentary sources from the author's biography with fictional events in order to mock Chernyshevsky's search for realism in art.[64] According to Darnell, *The Gift* engages with an even broader discussion on fatherly figures running back to Turgenev, in *Father and Sons* (1862) and then Chernyshevsky's response to it in *What is to Be Done?* (1863) (12).

In this somewhat convoluted lineage of fatherly figures, in which fictional and scientific text meet, the genealogical family encounters the elective tradition and the oppositional father, with hints of metaphysical survival. Built in response to his many father figures, Fyodor's work is composed as a complex ideological construct where affection, bodily pleasures, and ideology overlap. Just so, Nabokov shares with queer theory a preoccupation in turning the law of the father into a complex process instead of a fixed category. Ultimately, Nabokov is saying that he is not a man because he inherited his father's blood, or his father's culture and name, but rather because of his many-sided psychological and corporeal kinship with several fatherly figures. "Neither in environment nor in heredity can I find the exact instrument that fashioned me," he writes in his autobiography (10).

[64] Also see Sergei Davidov, "The Gift: Nabokov Aesthetic Exorcism of Chernyshevsky" (1985).

Nabokov's genealogy of fathers, nevertheless, fetishizes patriarchy, rejecting the presence of female authors unless it is an abstract metaphor for his language and culture, as I mentioned before. The approximation between Nabokov and queer theory, at this point, becomes entirely problematic. One might ask first, what kind of literary continuity is at stake when queer and feminist scholars cannot identify with Nabokov's misogyny, yet can relate to his complex forms of literary filiation?

Nabokov needs to be meaningful and indispensable to the agenda of queer and feminist politics in order to be cited. It is not just a matter of accepting his qualities as a writer or his complex genealogy, turning a blind eye to his homophobia and sexism as a sign of Nabokov's time. One must make a troubling return, bringing to the surface the 'contested sites' of his poetics, which ultimately means transforming Nabokov's negative example into queer endings.

As I have explained throughout this chapter, one of Nabokov's 'contested sites' is in how he had enjoyed an 'allure of queerness' in his male literary family of geniuses, as long as it served to redouble his masculinity. He fetishizes a form of patriarchal literature that is composed only by male authors, without acknowledging the homosocial structure implied by this system.[65]

Another good example of such "allure of queerness" is in how Nabokov described his process of writing and readership in terms of bodily encounters. Leland De La Durantaye also observes how Nabokov's notion of readership indulges in a "phenomenology of the spine" (57) – what Delage-Toriel calls his "epistemophilic project" (25) – emphasizing bodily thrills between authors and readers. This becomes more evident when Nabokov urges his students to "wrestle with an author" (*SO* 183) or

[65] Sedgwick explains, in the introduction to *Between Men* (1985), that she wants to "draw the 'homosocial' back into the order of 'desire,' of the potentially erotic, then, is to hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual−a continuum whose visibility, for man, in our society, is radically disrupted" (1-2).

to "caress" or "fondle the details of a book" (*LL* 1) in order to searching for a "tingle of the spine": "a wise reader reads the book of genius not with his heart, not so much with his brain, but with the spine. It is there that occurs the tell-tale tingle… a pleasure which is both sensual and intellectual." (*LL* 6) These ideas promote readership as a mastery of the body in terms of sport or romantic relationships (Delage-Toriel 26), which, in the case of Nabokov, are only shaped in regard to his masculine interlocutors, at costs of female readership and femininity. Homoerotic desires thus are at the core of Nabokov's literary relations as a consequence of his erasure of femininity.

Nabokov becomes interesting for queer studies, therefore, inasmuch as he is a heterosexual author, he points to a historical crisis of the binary identities hetero/ homo in his poetics.[66] Not only that, he also points to a crisis on the concept of masculinity, demonstrating an exaggerated fear of being identified with categories customarily attributed to women or children: sentimentality, dependence, influence, weakness, empathy, nurturance, deference.[67] No wonder that when Nabokov belittles other male authors, he calls them "boys," suggesting that he is an adult and authoritarian figure in opposition to these other 'childish' authors (*SO* 42).

There are several ways of approaching this problem. James Creech (1997) explains that modern authors had demonstrated anguish with the category of modern masculinity, being born in "a crisis provoked in part by an implicit reckoning with the danger," when the category of homosexuality arose in the turn of the twentieth century

[66] I am not saying that Nabokov is a closet author. On the contrary, like Sedgwick explains, "I do not mean to discuss genital homosexual desire as 'at the roof of' other forms of male homosociality−but rather a strategy for making generalizations about, and marking historical differences in, the structure of man's relation with other men" (1985: 2). In other words, the eroticism present in Nabokov is not a sign of his sexuality, but it is a social code forged by the historical differences between the category of hetero and homo.

[67] In this, I side with José Esteban, who argues that subjectivity goes beyond the system of pure identification with heteronormativity, on the one side, or standing against it, on the other. Fixed narratives of identity reduce "subjectivity to either a social constructivist model or what has been called essentialist understanding of the self" (6), erasing the porousness between socially coded roles, identity, and desires.

(249). However, modernist authors were not only preoccupied with the category of homosexuals *per se*, manifesting it through homophobia but also with the presence of female traces in their works and intra-subjective life, as a crisis in masculinity.

Nabokov was born and raised in this historical moment. From a young age, he was aware that homosexuality was a category under attack, also due to his brother Sergey's homosexuality (*SM* 195-196). Nabokov, however, expresses his concerns in terms of female and male attributes instead of attacking the category of homosexuality *per se.* In *Speak, Memory*, for example, he describes his differences with his younger sibling following a typical opposition between feminine and masculine. While Vladimir enjoyed "trains, pistols and Red Indians;" Sergey was quiet and shy. Sergey enjoyed opera and music, spending time with the tutors (ibid.). Later in life, when Nabokov met his brother's companion, he was relieved to learn that his brother's partner was not a "pederast type," but Nabokov still felt uncomfortable in the presence of one of their male friends, "red-lipped and curly" (*RY* 396). From this one might conclude that Nabokov was more troubled by the disruption of gender normativity than with homosexuality as a sexual practice or as a bond between heterosexual men.

A scene that frequently appears in Nabokov's novels highlights his particular preoccupation with gender roles. In *Speak, Memory* (153) there is a moment, imagined more fully in *Ada*, in which male teenagers engage in homosexual initiation. The narrator makes fun of these young boys, describing their games as degrading, but he never calls them 'homosexual.' Nabokov seems to accept that sexual play between members of the same sex neither leads necessarily to homosexuality nor contradicts

masculinity as such.[68] He nevertheless singles out one character from the group in order to demonstrate his disgust. The protagonist writes:

> Every dormitory had its catamite. One hysterical lad from Upsala, cross-eyed, loose-lipped, with almost abnormally awkward limbs, but with a wonderfully tender skin texture and the round creamy charms of Bronzino's Cupid (the big one, whom a delighted satyr discovers in a lady's bower), was much prized and tortured by a group of foreign boys, mostly Greek and English, led by Cheshire, the rugby ace; and partly out of bravado, partly out of curiosity, Van surmounted his disgust and coldly watched their rough orgies. Soon, however, he abandoned this surrogate for a more natural though equally heartless divertissement. (*Ada* 32)

Under attack here is not so much the "foreign boys" who acted out of "bravado" or "curiosity" (typically male characteristics), but the "hysterical," "awkward" boy who resembles a girl with "tender skin" and "round creamy charms" (ibid.). The homophobia is evident when the protagonist suggests that homosexual initiation was an "unnatural" divertissement. However, there is another issue laid out here, which seems to be part of a bigger problem regarding misogyny and fear of being aligned with feminine characteristics.

Nabokov's literary family, with its misogynistic and fetishizing tones, cannot be read outside this problematic triangulation between the categories of masculine, feminine and homosexuality, in the way they were unwrapped at the beginning of the twentieth century. One could say that Nabokov is fighting against the presence of homosexuality and femininity in his works, being afraid of both. His writings became

[68] The same occurs with Ada and Lucette, in *Ada*. Both have sexual relationships, but neither is identified as a lesbian, opening up a space for a difference between sexual activity and categories of identity.

then ‘the place’ where he could regain his masculinity, frequently manipulating and mocking other authors. In this context, it is not an accident that Nabokov reinforces his masculinity through relations of power: a male dominance, on the one side, and a submissive (female or child or homosexual), on the other, in his literary relations and plots. Nevertheless, a blind spot appears here. Without noticing, Nabokov enjoys a free experience of homosociality that, at times, hinges on homosexuality, manifested in his desire to share a ‘thrill’ (orgasm?) with other authors.[69]

[69] As I mentioned before, Sartre (1982[1939]) and Edmund Wilson (AY 493) have already called attention to Nabokov’s sadistic relationship with other authors and readers. The imagery of power discrepancy is at the center of *King, Queen, Knave*, and *Lolita*, but it appears again in the context of *Texture of Time*, when Nabokov wrestles to touch the essence of time. See *Ada’s Erotic Texture of Time*.

Part 02: *Ada*: Sensually Experiencing Time

> "'Ah,' sighs the traditional subject, 'if only I could extract myself from this narrow-minded body and roam through the cosmos, unfettered by any instrument, I would see the world as it is, without words, without models, without controversies, silent and contemplative'; 'Really?' replies the articulated body with some benign surprise, 'why do you wish to be dead? For myself, I want to be alive and thus I want more words, more controversies, more artificial settings, more instruments, so as to become sensitive to even more differences. My kingdom for a more embodied body!'"
>
> (Bruno Latour 2004: 211-212)

2.1 Introduction to Ada's riddle

Vladimir Nabokov's work resists easy classification. He was both a transnational and transcultural author, which is described in his own words as an "American author, born in Russia" (*SO* 26), with a long experience of exile in the US, Germany, and Switzerland. In literature, he has been characterized as a modernist author with a "Gallic slant" (Foster 1993: 14), in which a romantic undertone can be observed; or as a postmodernist metafictional author with an anachronistic obsession with individual genius, transcendence, and authorial control (Green 2008).[70] While occupying this special place in literary history, an author who exemplified the transition from high European modernism to American postmodernism, Nabokov deliberately problematizes the interpretative tasks of scholarship. Unable to categorize an author who did not wish to be categorized, critics have frequently claimed that Nabokov bridges modernism and postmodernism, combining contradictory material from these periods in his oeuvre (Fraysse 2008; Grattarola 2015).

Within Nabokov's rich and complex oeuvre, *Ada, or Ardor: A Family Chronicle* (1969) is a unique work in the trajectory of his career. Not necessarily because it is his best novel, but because it is his longest and most experimental one. Due to its hermetic language, the excessive number of parodies, and the explicit treatment of sexual behavior, the novel has been compared to James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (1939) (Amis 162). There might be some common points between the two books—oneiric undertones, incest taboos, unintelligible language—but, mostly because these novels

[70] In the context of Roland Barthes' "The Death of The Author" (1977[1967]), and Foucault's "What is an Author?" (1984[1969]), Nabokov's attempt to control the meaning of his texts, setting rules of how to be a "good reader" (*LL* 1), demonstrate an anachronistic desire for authorial control. In the same vein, he has demonstrated anxiety in regard to editor's alterations of his novels, as well as translations, constantly criticizing whatever did not please his taste. For more on Nabokov and authorial control see Rorty (1989); La Durantaye (2007); White (2017).

are uncomprehended texts. In both cases, critics ask themselves: Did Nabokov and Joyce lose control over their texts? Or might Nabokov and Joyce be teasing (and testing) the reader with new modes and linguistic codes? No wonder critics have invested in the trope of "teasing," saying this somewhat sexual element plays a fundamental key in *Ada* to uncover the meaning of the novel (Kazin 1982([1969]; Ellmann 1982[1969]; Naiman (2010). The novel indeed teases the reader into a multi-sensorial engagement with the text, testing his/her ability to endure in a pleasure-and-pain dynamic.[71] This difficulty is experienced first on a linguistic level and then to unravel the plot, which is equally challenging to understand.

Ada tells the story of an incestuous couple, the dark-haired siblings Ada and Van Veen, from the early ages of twelve and fourteen, respectively, to their final nonagenarian days. It vaguely follows the model of the family chronicle, providing a glimpse into the convoluted generational line of the Zemski (Earth) and Temnosiny (Sky) families. As is typical in incest narratives, there are some problems with regard to identity and parenthood: the sisters Aqua and Marina Durmanov (former Zemski) married, respectively, the cousins Demon and Daniel Veen (former Temnosiny). Demon, though, has an affair with Marina for years, which produces two offspring: Ada and Van.

In Ardis Manor, where most of the play happens, in the midst of the beautiful pastoral countryside, Ada and Van start a love affair as cousins, but soon enough they discover, through encrypted newspaper pieces and photos in the famous attic scene, that they are in fact brother and sister. They both ignored this information and continued an overly sexual relationship for years. Lucette, their half-sibling and ginger counterpart,

[71] See *Ada's Erotic Texture of Time.*

is a fundamental key to their relationship. She is in love with Van, but she never engages sexually with him, being homosexually initiated by Ada.

This family is not only unique in their behavior, but also beautiful and wealthy, which frequently points to the aristocratic undertone of the text, reinforced by the incest theme and the presence of countless servants and governesses that orbit the family. This elitism is also observed in Nabokov's intertextual net of references and his references to great authors of the Russian, American, and French traditions, especially Pushkin, Chateaubriand, and Proust.

Nabokov himself might have given the best description of the novel when he outlines an imaginary place where he would like to live. In his words:

> I would have to construct a mosaic of time and space to suit my desires and demands. It would be too complicated to tabulate all the elements of this combination. But now I know pretty well what it should include. It should include warm climate, daily baths, an absence of radio music and traffic noise, the honey of ancient Persia, a complete microfilm library, and the unique and indescribable rapture of learning more and more about the moon and the planets. In other words, I think I would like to be in the United States of the nineteen-sixties, but would not mind distributing some of my other organs and limbs through various centuries and countries. (*SO* 48)

Ada, one could say, is the materialization of his dream. In order to fulfill his wishes, Nabokov placed his novel in another planet called Antiterra, providing a hint of science-fiction (one could even claim it is an ur-steampunk) that is never developed in full. The geography of Antiterra, as Nabokov imagines above, is in spatial disarray: Russia, France, and America share frontiers, combining Nabokov's favorite landscapes. Regarding time, *Ada* is also out of joint. Organizing the plot as a time-travel narrative,

Nabokov collapses nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century technologies with futuristic views of flying carpets and aero cables, in which sensory elements, his "organs and limbs," reflect the specific experiences of these periods.

One might conclude that eccentricity and abundance are the norm in *Ada*, but, more than that, the novel is about 'breaking barriers.' Nabokov has deliberately disrupted the conventions of social life, sexuality, space-time, and narrative perspective. Due to an odd assemblage of all of these elements, John Updike condemns *Ada* for the lack of recognizable human experience (qtd. in *AY* 542). Martin Amis explains that he could read the novel only after several attempts, concluding that "[i]t is a waterlogged corpse at the stage of maximal bloat" (2009: 162).

In his pre-publication review of *Ada, or Ardor*, in the *New York Times* (May 4th 1969), Alfred Appel proclaimed it, however, a "supremely original work of the imagination" (34). Appel argued that the novel would help raise Nabokov to the podium of major authors, "a peer of Kafka, Proust and Joyce" (ibid.). Nevertheless, Appel clearly found it difficult to spell out exactly what the main theme of the book was. If one were to sum up the scattered comments in this, *Ada*'s first piece of criticism, the novel is: (1) an erotic, incestuous love story with Arcadian tones; (2) a thesis novel that investigates the nature of time; (3) "a museum of the novel," i.e., a parody on the evolution of the novel; (4) a science-fiction tale that explores the opposition between Antiterra and Terra, the real and the otherworld; (5) an autobiographical narrative, in which Nabokov combines his transnational past with his beloved authors and themes; (6) a novel about life and death, as Nabokov, near seventy years old, finally dealt with the topic of aging; and (7) a visual landscape in literary terms, a book transformed into a picture, in dialogue with the Western artistic canon, especially Hieronymus Bosch.

Appel claims that *Ada* is the apotheosis of a long poetical process through which Nabokov finally became ready to create a new universe, another parallel space-time, as a continuation of the imaginary worlds of Padukgrad and Zembla in *Bend Sinister* and *Pale Fire* respectively (34). In much the same vein, Robert Alter (1982[1969]) claimed that *Ada* was the culmination of Nabokov's style, in which he uses "parody as a kind of springboard for leaping into the highest region of serious emotion" (1982[1969]: 212). Trying to make sense out of so many different interpretations, one often starts to feel like Kinbote, writing a "demented commentary on Shade" (Hodgart 4).

Confronting such difficulties, many scholars chose to avoid content analysis altogether, following instead the linguistic close-reading Nabokov so strongly incentivized. Along these lines, Carol Johnson (1982[1969]) stated that Nabokov had fulfilled Flaubert's desiderata to write a novel about nothing, arguing that *Ada* "has succeeded in perpetrating a feat of style (or, more properly, a feat of styles) to the virtual exclusion of substance" (209). The 1970s and 1980s were marked by a profusion of studies that searched primarily for literary sources and devices, a trend that reached its pinnacle in Boyd's annotated version of the novel, initially published in *The Nabokovian*, and currently available on the Internet.[72]

Ada is more than allusions and language though. Mary Ellen Fox once summarized it thus: "Love. Language. Time. These are the leitmotifs of the novel, and form a triumvirate and progression: body, mind and soul" (9). Observing the presence of other elements, in the 1980s and 1990s, time and nostalgia followed this first

[72] Studies that focus mainly on literary sources and intertextuality in *Ada*: Francis Bulhof, "Dutch Footnotes to Nabokov's *Ada*" (1974); D. Barton Johnson, "Nabokov's *Ada* and Puškin's *Eugene Onegin*" (1971), "A Possible Anti-Source for *Ada*, or, Did Nabokov Read German Novels?" (1981), "The Scrabble Game in *Ada* or Taking Nabokov Clitorally" (1982); "The Labyrinth of Incest in Nabokov's *Ada*" (1986); "Ada and Percy: Bereft Maidens and Dead Officers" (1993); Carl R. Proffer, "*Ada* as Wonderland: A glossary of Allusions to Russian Literature" (1974); Annapaola Cancogni, *The Mirage in the Mirror: Nabokov's Ada and Its French Pre-Texts* (1985); and Brian Boyd, Ada Online: <http://www.ada.auckland.ac.nz/>.

emphasis on intertextuality. Specialists, as I mentioned in *Part 01*, focused on Nabokov's modernist references and his desire to return to his past. In the 1990s, Nabokov's dialogue with new physics came to the forefront, however, without problematizing the assemblage of multiple references and lines of thought.[73]

What is at stake here is that *Ada*, in the mode of a postmodernist novel, cannot be condensed into one theme developing in time and space. It combines contradictory theories, several thematic lines, parallel frames of reference, and different ontological and epistemological worlds.

2.2 *Ada*'s Postmodernism: New Physics and Eroticism

Ada, as I will demonstrate, is a pinnacle of such erotic and playful exploration of time. When the novel was published, Jorge Luis Borges had already written *A New Refutation of Time* (1944-1946) and played with the embedded and endless time in *The Library of Babel* (1941) and *The Aleph* (1945).[74] Beckett's late work had also already provided "a confusion and blurring of time," and his endless repetitions emptied the narrative from its sequential nature, transforming it into a liminal experience of meaning (Mooney 286). Thomas Pinchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1963), published only four years after *Ada*, innovatively mixed philosophical and scientific theories to explain "the function of chance and causation in a post-historical context" (Heise 185). Clearly following this tradition, Nabokov was also exploring time's aporias and multiple possibilities, finally responding to new physics and incorporating alternative formats of time, such as layering, collapsing, embedding, forking paths, and rewinding, in the novel.

[73] See *Part 01, High-Modernism: Idealizing Timelessness, for a complete list of references.*
[74] Borges is mentioned several times in *Ada*. The treatise embedded in the novel, *Texture of Time*, could be even considered a response to Borges's philosophical text.

Nevertheless, one can outline two arguments when analyzing time in *Ada, or Ardor*. The first bears the stamp of the romantic-modernist interpretation and continues to see in this novel an exploration of time as nostalgia in exile. The second takes an entirely different route, reading *Ada* in the light of new physics and postmodernist spatiality, focusing on Nabokov's dialogue with Einstein and quantum theory.

From now on, I will generically call the first approach, which is by far the most common interpretation of the novel, 'modernist.' In this vein, Boyd says that *Ada* mingles the "ardor of love and the ache of exile, Van's exile from Ada, from Ardis, from the perfect past of his youth" (*AY* 505). One can find several articles that formulate this idea in different ways.[75] Márta Pellérdi (2010), for example, says, "Nabokov in the sixties, after publishing his autobiography, *Speak, Memory*, was still intent on capturing the nature of Time through Memory and Art" (113). Even Stephen Blackwell, who calls attention to the presence of new physics in Nabokov's works, oddly claims that nostalgia and "fell time" is above material bodies in the novel. He writes:

> His works suggest that the exploration of mind may offer the most likely pathway toward the discovery of deeper realities, because the mind itself is more clearly reflective of those depths than are the behaviour of material bodies (whether planets or photons) moving through space and time. (2009: 137)

Blackwell's interpretation is not so much modernist but idealist, placing consciousness as the right way to access the world. Elsewhere, Stephen Blackwell has associated Nabokov with phenomenology, saying that "Nabokov embodies the eternal, and nontraditional phenomenological modelings of 'subjective time" (2016: 245).

[75] Along these lines are Jeffrey Leonard, "In Place of Lost Time: *Ada*" (1970); Dwight A. Yates, *Nabokov's Ada and the Texture of Time* (1970); Michael H. Begnal, "Past, Present, Future, Death: Vladimir Nabokov's 'Ada'" (1982).

More recently, scholars have put forward a completely different interpretation. Analyzing the disruptions of linear time in the book, they find in *Ada* a telling example of postmodern temporalities. For these scholars, Nabokov investigates, in *Ada*, experimental formats outside the Newtonian concept of absolute time. These studies, however, could not be more discrepant in how they address Nabokov's postmodernism. Some associate Nabokov with Einstein (Donley and Friedman 1985; Trousdale 2010), while N. Katherine Hayles (1984) claims the novel is a defense of time's reversibility, following Martin Gardner's theory in *The Ambidextrous Universe* (111). Elizabeth Ermarth (1992) argues that Nabokov accepts the instability of temporal modes, although she does not apply one specific theory of time. Noting the robust presence of new physics, parallel worlds, and time traveling in the novel, Roy Arthur Swanson (1975) and Charles Nicol (1987) claim that *Ada* is an example of science fiction. These scholars, however, exclude an analysis of sexuality and desire. In fact, the majority of the postmodern canon, forwarded by Edward Soja, Fredric Jameson, David Harvey, "actively excluded sexuality as a category for analysis precisely because desire has been cast by Neo-Marxists as a ludic body politics that obstructs the 'real' work of activism" (Halberstam 5).

My attempt to re-introduce the erotic body into the analysis of *Ada, or Ardor* follows a more recent scholarly tendency that challenges Nabokov's avoidance of sexual interpretation (Herbold 2008; Naiman 2010; Couturier 2014).[76] Along the same line with these scholars, my goal is to investigate how sexuality informs not only the plot and theme of his works, but extrapolates into others spheres providing the model

[76] My interest also follows a general tendency to bring up attention, in the context of feminist and gender studies, to the body, either the complexities of affect, the real description of bodies in literature, or the idea of the body as a paradigm of analysis for narratology. See Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (1994); Tim Armstrong, *American Bodies: Cultural History of the Physique* (1996); Donn Welton, *Body and Flesh: A philosophical Reader* (1998); Daniel Punday, *Narrative Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Narratology* (2003).

for some of Nabokov's narrative devices, intertextual relationships, or reader-authors dynamics. My interest is also to demonstrate how Nabokov comes to emphasize touch and texture in *Ada* via embodied memories. First, I observe how the very categories of time and space are presented through an 'erotic rhetoric:' time is rewind like in film, following the movement of the characters' sexual plays. It also increases and collapses like sexual climax and ejaculations; it moves slowly and then faster, providing sexual encounters. Time is systematically bewildered by light's effects and movements; it splits along forking paths only to return to normal. This means that time and sexuality are equally twisted along the plot and ingrained in the baffling movements of the new physics imagery and postmodern spatial configurations. Although Nabokov had already projected the female body onto the landscape, especially in *Lolita* (Shute 2003), such a strategy gains new proportions in *Ada*, where time is shattered into multiple formats, becoming a fetishizing assemblage of clothes, literary periods, philosophical and scientific theories. With this in mind, in the next chapters, I will cross Ada's post-modernist descriptions with Nabokov's erotic plays to undertsand how sexuality and time come together in this novel.

2.3 Layering and Collapsing: The Intensities of Time

Due to its 'time travel' narrative mode, different historical times are inevitably layered in the discourse and diegetic levels of *Ada, or Ardor*: nineteenth-century calèches, magic carpets, motorcycles, and spaceships all come together in the sequence of one another.[77] These different temporal layers are compressed and collapsed into another, often resembling the language of sexual excitement and physiological intensities.[78]

[77] Although there is no real experience of 'time traveling' in the plot, I believe that Nabokov wants to create this effect through the combination of different historical periods.

[78] In Van's erotic obsession with his sister, he imagines that time is rhythm and texture, combining Alfred North Whitehead's and Henri Bergson's philosophy (*Ada* 453). This double conceptualization says a lot

'Layering,' therefore, will be this chapter's key theoretical category. Originally proposed by Elana Gomel (2014) in her analysis of Charles Dickens, Gomel argues that, in Dickens, London's time is divided between urban space and a secondary reality superimposed upon that space, in which past and present intermingle, and the boundaries between animate and inanimate are blurred (41). As an example, she considers the following famous passage from *Bleak House* (2011[1853]):

> LONDON. Michaelmas Term lately over, and the Lord Chancellor sitting in Lincoln's Inn Hall. Implacable November weather. As much mud in the streets as if the waters had but newly retired from the face of the earth, and it would not be wonderful to meet a Megalosaurus, forty feet long or so, waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill. (7)

Here Dickens creates an impossible topography. Imagining dinosaurs within the urban landscape, he superimposes two antinomic realities and paints a new subversive picture on top of the realistic one for humoristic purpose. Richard Brian calls such temporalities "conflated time": "the narrative moves from setting to setting, and invariably the 'separated' times and spaces begin to melt or to bleed into each other" (2002: 51).

Nabokov, who praised and taught Dickens' *Bleak House* (*LL* 63), also collapses layers of parallel time in *Ada, or Ardor*. In the following passage, which has no erotic content, but is nevertheless filled with emotional disaffection, Van layers three historical times instead of two, intensifying the effect of this literary practice. During a drive through the Alps, Van composes a treatise on the nature of time. As the car drives along the winding mountain roads, his mind wanders through different concepts of time. He writes:

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about Van's radical stress on the internal rhythms of his own deviant body while foregrounding the various textures provided by his writing's composition.

> One especially grotesque inference, drawn (I think by Engelwein) from Relativity Theory — and destroying it, if drawn correctly — is that the galactonaut and his domestic animals, after touring the speed spas of Space, would return younger than if they had stayed at home all the time. Imagine them filing out of their airark — rather like those 'Lions,' juvenilified by romp suits, exuding from one of those huge chartered buses that stop, horribly blinking, in front of a man's impatient sedan just where the highway wizens to squeeze through the narrows of a mountain village. (426)

Van puns on the name of the French physicist Paul Langevin, germanising it. "Vin" (wine in French), becomes "Wein," while "ange" (angel) turns into "Engel." What Nabokov intended by this play on words is hard to determine, but I would guess it used to align Langevin with his German forerunners, Einstein and Minkowski.

This double linguistic play aside, one can find at least three different temporal manipulations in this passage, each of which is delicately attached to the other. First, the rocket from Langevin's thought experiment intersects with the Old Testament's Noah's Ark. The futuristic time of 'galactonauts' and Laika, the Soviet space dog, overlaps with the "domestic animals," "ark" and "Lions" of Noah's flood expedition. Van combines, in a triptych panel, the remote past of the Biblical tale, the futuristic expeditions of rockets, and his local present: "chartered buses that stop, horribly blinking, in front of a man's impatient sedan" (ibid.). In this intricate composition of images, one panel does not simply superimpose onto the other, as in Dickens. Rather they are stitched together. "Galactonaut" and "airark" are *portmanteaus*, in which the spatiality of the word brings together different historical moments, sewing them together. Cosmonauts, Noah, and tourists, comically, form a strand of development, in which different temporal realities are stitched together.

Many passages of the novel exemplify such a strategy because encapsulating different strata of literary styles, geographies, and technologies is one of the plot's organizational principles. Prehistoric, romanticism, and relativism are all anachronistically compressed, rubbing up against one another. This structure transforms what was supposed to be smooth into juxtaposition embodying Van Veen's ideas that time is texture, "an accumulation of sensa, not as the dissolution of Time" (*Ada* 427). It is only in the conglomeration of temporalities that one can caress time's multiple manifestations, as Van philosophically wishes to do (*Ada* 420). In the traditional notion of time, which flows away—"time chopping heads" (ibid.)—there is no cluster to be caressed.

The friction between these temporalities is described in erotic terms in other passages. At the very beginning of the novel, Van associates "collapsing time" with ejaculation (*Ada* 32). Later on, the protagonist claims that, like an erection or an orgasm, the story is "gradually increasing, very gradually building up a logical love story" and just as gradually reversing and disintegrating into something else (*Ada* 443). In this passage, temporal, textual, and sexual ecstasy were one single continuum, building up its intensity in order to be transformed into something else after its climax.

In *Speak, Memory*, Nabokov belittles the classical psychoanalytic metaphor between a penis and a train. In response, he draws a parallel between new physics and eroticism, describing the erection of "smooth and round objects" as the pleasure of conquering space and time:

> Rapid growth, quantum-quick thought, the roller coaster of the circulatory system — all forms of vitality are forms of velocity, and no wonder a growing child desires to out-Nature Nature by filling a minimum stretch of time with a maximum of spatial enjoyment. Innermost in man is the spiritual pleasure

> derivable from the possibilities of outtugging and outrunning gravity, of overcoming or re-enacting the earth's pull. The miraculous paradox of smooth round objects conquering space by simply tumbling over and over, instead of laboriously lifting heavy limbs in order to progress, must have given young mankind a most salutary shock. (229)

Nabokov provides a much more complex surrogate for Freud's simplistic phallic symbolism. "Rapid growth" refers to the erection of the penis, "quantum-quick thought," to an erotic thought that is immediately felt in various organs of the body through the "roller coaster of the circulatory system" (ibid.). The child relishes the swift pleasure of filing space when the flaccid penis becomes erect. Next, in the way the erect penis seems to defy gravity, bouncing up and down. The child "out-Natures Nature" by "reenacting the earth's pull" (ibid.).

Nabokov might be expounding upon means of transportation, but he suggests here that the physiological experience of sexual excitement binds our sense of time and space with the flesh. He also unveils a hidden association between the intensity of physiological experiences (sexual or otherwise) and time as magnitude/intensity in Bergson's theory (1957[1889]: 2).[79] Van even says that time's direction is an illusion "obscurely related to the mysteries of growth and gravitation" (*Ada* 422), also claiming that our concept of time might change if we had a different corporeal existence (*Ada* 420).

Even the description of the house, Ardis Manor, is marked by this accumulation of temporal layers that can be better felt than pictured:

[79] Bergson defends, in *Time and Free Will* (1889), the view that time should not be measured as quantity, but as quality. Duration is intensity and magnitude, and cannot be fragmented quantitatively in parts as clocks and calendars. For Bergson, past and present intersect and can only be felt as a whole (6).

> Owing to a mixture of overlapping styles and tiles (not easily explainable in non-technical terms to non-roof-lovers), as well as to a haphazard continuum, so to speak, of renovations, the roof of Ardis Manor presented an indescribable confusion of angles and levels, of tin-green and fin-gray surfaces, of scenic ridges and wind-proof nooks. (*Ada* 41)

Terms like "mixture," "overlap," "continuum," and "confusion" describe the space as texture, combining several temporal renovations. They also bear a more than passing resemblance to Bergson's concept of duration: "this unfolding multiplicity constitutes duration, which is a succession without distinction, an interpenetration of elements so heterogeneous that former states can never recur" (1957[1889]: xi). Bergsonian duration finds its echo in *Ada*, when Van expounds upon his sister's images in his heads, as "fragments of tessellation" and as a "mosaic" that "consisted of a selection and blend of such random images and expressions" (235).

There is a recurrent attempt to stitch time immemorial together with other more situated historical periods, stressing the discrepancies between these temporalities and, at the same time, combining them through a 'forged' continuity.[80] In the following scene, Van and Ada not only represent the biblical couple but also imagine themselves as a typical pair at the turn of the twentieth century, looking at a rowboat called *Souvenance* (Recollection):

> [t]hey saw themselves standing there, embraced, clothed only in mobile leafy shadows, and watching the red rowboat with its mobile inlay of reflected ripples carry them off, waving, waving their handkerchiefs; and that mystery of mixes sequences was enhanced by such things as the boat's floating back to

[80] Simon Karlinsky uncovers a similar structure in Nabokov's short story, *Lance*, identifying three parallel lines: medieval romance, mountain climbing, and interplanetary travels (271).

> them while it still receded, the oars crippled by refraction, the sun-flecks now rippling the other way like the strobe effect of spokes counterwheeling as the pageant rolls by. Time tricked them, made one of them ask a remembered question, caused the other to give a forgotten answer. (*Ada* 171)

Foreseeing the end of the romantic tale, Van enjoys their incestuous love before the fall into historical time. The biblical image of Adam and Eve, though, is interrupted by the optical phenomenon called the 'strobe effect.' The boat, *Recollection*, was "floating back to them"—but receding at the same time. This impression is a result of flashing lights: depending on the frequency of flashes, the object might appear to be static or moving in reverse. It is clear in this scene that space and time in the novel depend on their physical nature, i.e., the effect of the light suddenly projected a different scenario, moving the scene from Eden into farewells and departures.[81] This optical illusion disrupts the original idea of prelapsarian timelessness, promptly 'throwing' the couple into another space-time, along with their handkerchiefs. It reflects their anxiety over their separation, as they see themselves moving apart and simultaneously returning.

These mixed sequences encompass not only the subjective confusion of questions and answers but also the multiple means whereby the couple is temporally reproduced in this scene. At first, there is identification and double-exposure between Adam/Eve-Ada/Van. In the sequence, they are projected into the unstable surface of the water as an imaginary reflection. It is not a matter just of layering these instances in the materiality of the text, but also of foregrounding the means by which it happens: superposition, projection, and broken reflections. These strategies enhance the emotional intensity of the scene and break the ideal of smooth and linear temporalities

[81] Although I do not agree with Stephen Blackwell's interpretation of the novel, he also confirms that in *Ada*:" space, time, light, electricity, and mechanics are presented in a way that foregrounds their *physical* nature (2009:157).

in the novel.

The different generations of Veens that co-exist in Ardis also evoke the simultaneity of the remote past and the present. The layering of generations marks a break from the sense of continuity. The family, as a micro-cosmos of unity, is knocked from homogeneous movement when desires and sexual practices come to the front. Incest, adultery, and lesbianism transform the linearity of the family into a convoluted line of genealogy, also leading to infertility. The family paintings around the house also offer a parallel between past and present. Ardis Park becomes a museum, a locus of encounter in which the remote past claustrophobically supervises the new generation, approving or disapproving its path, transforming distant familial generations into a source of identification, but also of anxiety. One might conclude that collapsing temporalities in family relations are undesired and somewhat gloomy in the novel, suggesting a veiled critique of heteronormativity and genealogy.

The telephone scene, which, according to Nabokov, was the springboard of the novel, might be considered the pinnacle of such a layering system (*SO* 122). When Ada called Van in 1922, he realized that the phone had preserved the essence of her voice and the timbre of the past, "as if the past had put through that call, a miraculous connection" (*Ada* 436). The telephone call is described as an "*entrain,* that whelming of quasi-erotic pleasure, that assurance and animation" (437), establishing an erotic parallel between her voice and a penetration. Van continues:

> [t]hat telephone voice, by resurrecting the past and linking it up with the present, with the darkening slate-blue mountains beyond the lake, with the spangles of the sun wake dancing through the poplar, formed the centerpiece in his deepest perception of tangible time, the glittering 'now' that was the

only reality of Time's texture. After the glory of the summit there came the difficult descent. (*Ada* 437)

The emotional intensity of the moment—also considered by Charles Nicol to be the climax of the novel (2003: 92)—is shaped by the tension between Van's desire for continuity of the past and the irresolute fact that Ada has indeed aged. The importance of the technological device here cannot be overstated – it is only through this material medium that the grandiose clash between recollection, excitement, desire, and dissolution can be properly channeled. Time's "tangible reality" is, therefore, a cornucopia in which different spheres, including material ones, touch each other, entering, like a voice, through the phone into the protagonist's body, providing an emotional (and textual) climax.

The sexual excitement of the characters is transposed into the macro-organization of the text as well. What I am trying to say is that, if the telephone scene is the climax of the novel, *Ada, or Ardor*'s final part can be understood as a post-coital moment when the narrative's progress stops. In Chapter Five, Van finally assumes first-person present-tense narration, as if he were coming back to his senses after a long period of ecstasy, which can also be observed in the change of vocabulary and tone. Furthermore, this last section is a summary of the plot, intertwined with some comments regarding style. Like Nabokov had already done is *Speak, Memory*, Van impersonates a critic, writing a review of his *memoir*. It highlights the fact that the crucial events of the plot already took place at another moment, perverting the reader's expectation that it is only in the final pages of a novel that the climax appears.[82] In other words, Nabokov is playing with the parallels between narrative temporality and sexual intensities.

[82] Judith Roof explains that the 'end' in narrative development is directly associated with heterosexual orgasmic climax, death, and mastery. According to her, Walter Benjamin also saw death as correlated to the end of the narrative (7-13).

2.4 Rewinding: Cinema and the Desire to Manipulate Time

N. Katherine Hayles, in her analysis of field theory (1984), devotes a whole chapter to *Ada, or Ardor*. She believes that Nabokov wants to prove, in this novel, that time is reversible (111). Noting a reference to Martin Gardener's *Ambidextrous Universe* (1964) in *Texture of Time*, Hayles claims that Nabokov shares with Gardener the belief that time can be rewound. She draws this conclusion from the fact that the antiparticles, discovered in the 1950s, might be "an ordinary particle that has been rotated through a higher dimension, for example through the 'fourth dimension' of time," existing, therefore, in reverse time (115). Nabokov was indeed interested in the scientific possibility of the 'reversibility of time.'[83] However, it is a questionable assumption that the whole discussion of time in the novel can be condensed into time reversal. Rewinding time is an important, but not dominant, trope in *Ada, or Ardor*.

Of all the sections that concern time in *Ada*, Chapter Five, Part Three is the one that deals most explicitly with the question of its reversibility. This long section dwells on Lucette's and Van's cruise ship together, and it is centered on her sexual desire for him, which the latter hinders to avoid another incestuous relationship.

Along the journey, Lucette becomes increasingly anxious, pushing the narrative to its denouement (Lucette wants it to be a climax with sexual seduction), while Van tries to gain time by rewinding it, forestalling this eventuality. Just as the novel, as a genre, enacts a drama between two conflicting desires—the forward impulse to move toward closure and the backward desire of memory (de Lauretis 125)—Van and Lucette's temporalities reproduce the reader's desire for the plot to move forward and

[83] Several of Nabokov's sources for the novel have researched the possibility of time's reversibility: J. W. Dunne, A. N. Whitehead, Miliĉ Čapek, J. M. E. McTaggart, Albert Einstein, and Minkowski. Not only that Nabokov's coeval authors, like Jorge Luis Borges, also have speculated on this possibility. See *Thinking Erotically about Time*.

backward. It is as if the sexual tension between the characters had also been manifested in the reading process itself.[84] On top of that, the boat also moves hectically, replaying these back and forth movements again.

Eventually, Van also becomes sexually aroused. The chapter escalates to the point that he considers yielding to her desires. When he finally entertains the possibility of having a sexual relationship with her, a galloping countdown starts. It turns out Lucette is about to die: "Lucinda Veen was only five hours old if one reversed the human time current" (*Ada* 382). In saying this, right in the middle of the chapter, Van immediately changes the expectation of the reader. As one already knows what is about to happen in anticipation, he steals from this section its climax, investing in the dichotomy between reversibility and progress.

During these five hours, Van forces her to have a long stroll around the ship. The trope of reverse time is re-introduced along their path:

> He loudly exclaimed that he would slap the next jackanapes, and involuntarily walked backward with ridiculous truculent gestures into a folded deck chair (he also running the reel of time backward, in a minor way), which caused her to emit a yelp of laughter. (*Ada* 383)

This passage is heavily indebted to cinematographic technique. Reversing time here is not merely a change in the order of the scenes—an opposition between *syuzhet* and *fabula*—but an actual, gestural bodily movement backward as if one were rewinding the tape of life. The malleability of the film is transposed into new bodily experiences, juxtaposing apparatus and physiology.

[84] Peter Brooks (1984) also suggests that the narrative plays with three different time-related desires: the desire of the text itself, the reader's desire for the plot, and the human desire to tell one's own story (326).

Martin Amis, who had an ambiguous relationship with Nabokov, has been mentioned several times in postmodern narratology for publishing a whole novel in the style of 'retroverted' narrative.[85] In Amis's *Arrow Time* (1984), the life of a German doctor during the Holocaust is told in reverse chronology, transforming concentration camps from the sites of mass murder to locales from which life sprouted. The most striking feature of the method of time retroverted is an evident corruption of the naturalized order of cause and effect, and a desire to change history (Alber et al. 115).[86]

In *Ada*, as narrative time plays with cinematographic 'backwardness,' Van comes across a new film release, which serves as a perfect excuse to 'kill' a few hours with Lucette. The counterpointing rhythm between Lucette's forwardness and Van's 'backwardness' is then reproduced in the hectic movement of the boat depicted in the film, which is also going through a tempest. Here the movie embeds time within time by recreating the movements of the 'real' ship on the screen, enhancing, by extension, the readers' sense of dizziness due to all of these contrasting movements. In the film, a fortune-telling *gitana* (played by Ada) warns the hero that he will succumb to the sister of the heroine, transforming the idea of 'art imitating life' into a joke.[87] The parallels between cinematography and bodily experiences go even further. After the movie, Van runs to his cabin to relieve himself of sexual tension built up by the movie. After he ejaculates, he pictures Ada's neck "projected upon the screen of his paroxysm" and

[85] On Nabokov and Martin Amis, see Amis, *Visiting Mr. Nabokov and Other Excursions* (2011) and "The Problem with Nabokov" (2009).

[86] The disruption of cause and consequence is a standard device in *Ada, or Ardor*. Often, the cause of an event is withheld from the reader for many pages. There are several examples of such inversion: we know in advance, for example, that on Sundays, the newspaper cannot be delivered in time from Ladore to Ardis. The narrator explains almost two hundred pages later that this phenomenon occurs "because on Sundays you could not use motorcycles, old local law" (*Ada* 304). In the same vein, the description of Van's fight with Percy the Gray informs the reader that Van had hurt his knee, but not until thirty pages later the narrator reveals that Van had hit it against a stone when attacked from behind (*Ada* 245). This procedure not only requires patience but also forces the reader to contend with zigzagging through the text, looking for the implied relationships while ruffling the pages.

[87] For more on Ada's role in the movie, see Brian Boyd's *Nabokov's Ada: The Place of Consciousness* (1985: 132).

"divided by a flow of black hair" (*Ada* 386), establishing a parallel between the cinema's curtain and her hair.

The medium of cinema is particularly interesting for the temporal tensions at stake in the chapter. The movie represents not only Van's and Lucette's temporal hiccups, it also represents the resurgence of Ada from the past (time recorded and replayed), as well as the emotional repercussions of this resurgence (cinema as 'live' memory) (*Ada* 385). This chapter also reformulates the common notion of dying as watching one's life flash before one's eyes. As Lucette falls from the ship, she does not view her life as a movie, but rather pictures herself receding into the water in a sequence of images:

> As she began losing track of herself, she thought it proper to inform a series of receding Lucettes – telling them to pass it on and on in a trick-crystal regression – that what death amounted to was only a more complete assortment of the infinite fractions of solitude. (*Ada* 389)

The multiplication of Lucettes receding from the boat resembles the cinematographic technique of rewinding a tape, enabling the spectator to view more frames per second. The expression "trick-crystal regression" makes this reference even more poignant as it alludes to the material of the screen. The infinite repetition of Lucette postpones her death and also prolongs the moment of tension by obviating her final dissolution.

Throughout the plot belatedness and loneliness are the marks of Lucette. Van continually fails to see her, mistaking her for other characters, or missing her presence. I argue, quite differently from Boyd (1985: 113), that Lucette's tragic destiny is not a matter of blindness, but a matter of temporary delay. Van is conscious of his contempt for her, but he fails to respond to it at the proper time, as he is overwhelmed by his

relationship with Ada and his desire to pursue pleasure.[88] Concerning Lucette, time is always out of joint. Her temporal mismatch is perpetuated through the plot by her resemblance to various strangers coming in and out of train stations or sitting alone at restaurants à la Toulouse-Lautrec. She is a tragic *flâneur*. Van glances at her, but his approach comes too late.

This play between forward and backward transforms their story into cinematographic art, more specifically, an experimental film instead of a linear progression centered on the actions of the hero. Laura Mulvey explains that mainstream films "coded the erotic into the language of the dominant patriarchal order" and that a new language of desire might be possible in aesthetically avant-garde cinema (748). Decentered from the male linear narrative time, the hiccups of sequential time in this chapter explore alternative temporalities, opening up space for the counterbalancing pulls of Lucette's own time, giving her, finally, the 'time' she deserves.[89]

Film techniques are not only restricted to this chapter though.[90] In *Ada*, The narrator frequently acts as a camera in order to transform the past into a monument:

> [h]e stopped on the threshold of the main lounge, but hardly had he begun to scan the distribution of its scattered human contents, than an abrupt flurry occurred in a distant group. Ada, spurning decorum, was hurrying toward him. Her solitary and precipitate advance consumed in reverse all the years of their separation as she changed from a dark-glittering stranger with the high hair-do

[88] In *Nabokov's Ada: The Place of Consciousness*, Boyd argues that Van and Ada are morally blind to Lucette and their failure to see her transforms the novel into a tragedy about the responsibilities of consciousness (113).

[89] Commenting on 'tempus reversus' in Nabokov's work, Marina Grishakova mentions a similar moment in *Speak, Memory*, when Nabokov watches a homemade video and sees a new baby carriage as a coffin. She notes that in G. Méliés's film *The Vanishing Lady* (1896), a skeleton becomes a living woman (114), a comparable example of a cinematographic experiment with rewinding time.

[90] Chapter 32 (Part I) is also construed on cinematographic technique. It describes the characters studying the script adapted from Mlle. Larivière's novel. The narrator acts like a camera, first presenting the characters and then moving into the action of each isolated group. Linguistically, it also employs the vocabulary of cinematographic direction, like "[d]ouble take, double exposure" (*Ada* 161).

> in fashion to the pale-armed girl in black who had always belonged to him. At that particular twist of time they happened to be the only people conspicuously erect and active in the huge room, and heads turned and eyes peered when the two met in the middle of it as on a stage. (*Ada* 399-400)

Van's camera-eye pans the lounge and then focuses close-up on Ada, reminiscent of a cinematographic focalization that blurs the background. The dramatic tone of the scene finally transposes the characters from a busy hotel lounge to a solitary stage. Van is fashioning his past like a movie. The opposition between the movement of the camera and Ada's reverse aging revisits the possibility of rewinding time of the body as cinematic film.

Van, in fact, monumentalizes his history with Ada in a variety of media. The past is recorded in newspapers, photos, family albums, paintings, novelettes, novels, and letters. Never before had Nabokov explored technology so extensively—not only as a means of 'reproduction,' but also of 'production' of the past. Different from *Lolita* and *Laughter in the Dark*, cinema in *Ada* is more a "potential for transformation" than a sign of mainstream culture (Wyllie 223).

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the medium of cinema has proved particularly fruitful for discussions about the nature of time, and several cinematographic techniques were implemented in literature, widening the repertoire of narrative time. Cinema, for example, seems to have made the idea of time's reversibility more intelligible, offering the means to disembody our perspective from one-way biological time.[91] In this token, Elizabeth Freeman explains that the popularization of

[91] Van seems to follow this train of thought when he claims that "[t]he irreversibility of Time (which is not heading anywhere in the first place) is a very parochial affair: had our organs and orgitrons not been asymmetrical, our view of Time might have been amphitheatric and altogether grand, like ragged night and jagged mountains around a small, twinkling, satisfied Hamlet" (*Ada* 422).

homemade movies instilled a sense of belonging in the early twentieth-century middle-class family, occasioning discussions of time that were based on the materiality of the device and its gaps. In her words: these technologies both "participated in the newly rationalized time-sense of the industrial era and offered ways out of rationalized time by privileging the index, the archive, the gap between frames, and other devices that stopped or 'lost' time" (2010: 21). In *Ada*, Nabokov explores such possibilities. At the same time the domestic photography of Ardis Manor functions as a way of including Van and Ada as an extension of familial and social order, cinema, paradoxically, offers an alternative form of thinking about time based on its gaps and movements, in which the belated temporalities of Lucette, for example, finally come to be represented.

Henri Bergson was one of the first philosophers to incorporate it into his writings. In *Creative Evolution* (1922[1907]), certainly, a book with which Nabokov was acquainted, Bergson establishes an analogy between the cinematographic apparatus and human thought, criticizing the "cinematographical habit of our intellect" (329).[92] According to him, just as the camera breaks down the movement of life, the intellect splits the movement of reality into frames to make it intelligible. In contrast to Bergson, the camera-friendly and mediagenic contemporary Albert Einstein was excited by the analogies photography and motion pictures offered, frequently referring to the interconnection of space-time as 'snapshots of reality' that the mind assembles as a film.[93] Cinema was being used to prove contradicting ideas in philosophy and science, as Nabokov was undoubtedly aware, and Van Veen mentions this fact briefly in *Texture of Time* (*Ada* 424).

[92] Deleuze's *Cinema 1* (1986) and *Cinema 2* (1989), perhaps the most influential explorations of this topic, are heavily indebted to Bergson.
[93] See also *The Physicist and the Philosopher: Einstein, Bergson and the Debate* that Changed Our Understanding of Time by Jimena Canales (2015).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, thus, the possibility of time's reversibility was a topic that gave rise to heated debates between philosophers and scientists. Although Einstein believed that time could never be rewound, this phenomenon had been observed at the quantum level.[94] Gerald James Whitrow, one of Nabokov's primary sources for *Texture of Time*, notes that geneticists considered micro-mutations reversible (14). In the same vein, Martin Gardener devotes a whole book to demonstrating that certain events go only one way just because "it is extremely unlikely that [they] would go backward" (243),[95] suggesting that time can be reversible in other dimensions. Nabokov seems to be dialoguing with these possibilities, either in scientific or technological terms, in order to play with the temporalities of the characters.[96]

2.5 Embedding: The Pleasures of the Eye

In the first part of *Ada*, dominated by the pastoral mode, Ada unrolls a long catalogue on Botany, Lepidoptera, and Ornithology, guiding the reader through the natural history of Ardis Park, and entangling the brief paradise of her love for Van with the ephemeral life of its flora, especially orchids. But from Part Two on, when Van leaves Ardis, the novel shifts from natural history to physics, metaphysics, and philosophy, focusing on Van's career to the exclusion of Ada's "flowers and orchids," which he abhors (*Ada* 229).

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[94] Irreversibility is also fundamental to Whitehead's process theory. See Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers, *Order Out of Chaos*, chapter IX, pp. 257-259.

[95] Eugéne Minkowski, another of Nabokov's sources for *Texture of Time*, was a psychologist interested in schizophrenic dysphoria. He writes: "this pathology sheds light on the idea of *tempus reversus* as a gravitation towards the past," frequently leading patients to project themselves into clocks (qtd. in Grishakova 72-73), which might be one of the explanations why Van does that. See *Ada's Erotic Texture of Time*.

[96] See *Thinking Erotically about Time*.

Van's philosophical interest in the otherworld, time, and dreams, however, also derives from their romantic situation. Ripped out from the 'special space' (Ardis Manor), Van projects their love into other space-times, embedding micro-universes within the major plot that repeat their story in tone and content. *Letters from Terra* and the Floramours, which are concerned with the existence of these parallel universes, form the core of the novel's second part of the novel.

As Judith Roof explains, the middle of narratives tend to escape linear Oedipal structure and are instead characterized by repetition, delay, and the dilatory pleasure she identifies as the homosexual tendency of the plot inside its own "hetero-ideology" (85-86). When Van introduces *Letters from Terra* in the middle of the story, he creates a bottomless structure that 'perversely' reproduces the beginning of the plot, pointing to his anxiety concerning the future and a certain loss of control of its reproductive (linear) principle. One might conclude that *Ada* embeds time exactly in the middle of the text to foreclose time's flow, reshaping it as multiple others—other planets or other social places.

After their abrupt separation, Ada sends several letters to Van, attempting to reconcile. Out of pride the protagonist never answers any of her missives. Instead, he writes a science-fiction novel, *Letters from Terra*, which is an indirect response to her. In *Letters*, Van explores the otherworld as his mad patients have described it (*Ada* 266). This means that, although he is picturing an outside planet in another galaxy, he actually is investigating, in a loop, the inner space of mental insanity, subverting the outside-inside dichotomy typical of the genre of science fiction. He elaborates further on this play by suggesting that he and Ada might be the real physiological locus of parallel worlds: "why not assume their microcosmic presence in the golden globules ascending

quick-quick in this flute of Moët or in the corpuscles of my, Van Veen's — (or my, Ada Veen's) — bloodstream" (*Ada* 266).

In *Letters From Terra*, the heroine, Theresa, has maddened a scientist with her letters just as Ada has done to Van. Theresa then travels to meet the scientist in Antiterra where she is transformed into a miniature woman, swimming under the Doctor's microscope, with which he admires her with his 'humid' eyes:

> he, in his laboratory, has to place her on a slide under a powerful microscope in order to make out the tiny, though otherwise perfect, shape of his minikin sweetheart, a graceful microorganism extending transparent appendages toward his huge humid eye. Alas, the testibulus (test tube —never to be confused with *testiculus,* orchid), with Theresa swimming inside like a micromermaid, is 'accidentally' thrown away by Professor Leyman's (he had trimmed his name by that time) assistant, Flora. (*Ada* 267)

The scene is filled with sexual tension. The 'powerful' microscope is transformed into an extension of the professor's penis, lubricated by his eyes. There is a clear play on the words 'test tube' and '*testiculus*' (ibid.). Physically exposed and offered, almost commercially, to the eyes of the doctor, Teresa is transformed, thanks to her appendages, into a biological specimen. Because of her insignificant size as well as in her condition as a commercialized sexual token, she is disposable. The scientist exalts his control over the micromermaid, not only in scientific but also in sexual terms.

Film theorist Laura Mulvey calls this voyeuristic pleasure "scopophilia"—*Schaulust* in Freud's terms—defining it as "the pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight" (750). Cinema obviously depends on this relationship between spectator and object, dark and bright, but this gaze can also be noted in the perspectival relationship between the reader and the text, scientist and

object. In its impersonal, voyeuristic observance, science confirms a feeling of domination over the object of analysis. In this sense, the doctor and the micromermaid above represent Van's attempt to regain the control over his life, imagining and simulating a new story, in which he would get his revenge against Ada.

The otherworld of Terra, however, is not a better version of Antiterra. It is not a utopian or transcendental leap. According to the protagonist, Terra has "cheated," presenting a grotesque collage of historical events in which minds are not healthier, but even more delusional (*Ada* 268). Playing with these parallels worlds, Nabokov is not only warning the reader about the madness of the protagonist, but the author is also criticizing any attempt to escape historical materialism to the Eden of paradise, which, in this novel, is nothing more than the fantasy of an "insane mind" (266). One might conclude that, in this chapter, science and literature are underwritten by a desire for a better world that is continuously unrealized, a sadistic aspiration to regulate life that is fated to fail. This ironic view on the otherworldly is a shift in Nabokov's poetics from his early idealization of the rupture from time to the acceptance of the limits of humanity. Has Nabokov finally realized that his desire for the otherworld could lead to Terra?

Besides *Letters from Terra*, Van erects many other micro-universes to forget and yet relive his love for Ada: the Floramours. Eric van Veen (no relation) idealized in detail an eccentric complex of bawdy houses in which wealthy men could satisfy their desires in secrecy with very young boys and girls. Van calls the project 'erogenetics' (*Ada* 275), whereas Eric dies young and virgin, the whole architecture of lovemaking is built by his grandfather.

The Floramours are described as geographically isolated places, an island of pleasure, architecturally designed as a "labyrinth of hedges and walls with

inconspicuous doors to which only the guests and the guards had keys" (276). Morally, it reflects a unique space detached from society, in which a man (always men) can indulge himself with kidnaped children from all classes and quench his desires for sex and violence. It is not an accident that the desire for control is again exercised over vulnerable children. Van holds the aesthetic aspects of such an enterprise in high esteem—internal rules, physical appearances of the 'prostitutes,' and the romantic style of the dwellings—limiting his moral reflections to the observation that "eccentricity is the greatest grief's greatest remedy" (274), as if great desire could justify great violence. In Van's and Eric's delusional minds, Floramours are utopian worlds. In Michel Foucault's terms, it is a 'heterotopia of deviation,' a place in which otherness is experienced as a counter-site that inverts, contests, and reshapes the law. Colonies, brothels, prisons, and hospitals are examples of such unconventional spaces (1986: 23).[97]

The Floramours is not just a matter of exchanging relations in a mirror (utopia/dystopia, imagination/real, paradise/hell, world/otherworld). Rather, they reenact again the sacred and static dichotomies that have sanctified these sites in the first place, in direct opposition to concepts of time and space that are infinitely open and in constant movement. These spatial *loci*, therefore, reintroduce the norm over and over again in its own configuration. In this "space separated from time" (*Ada* 280), Van relives his experience with Ada in a dream-like atmosphere, in which elements of Ardis Park (the candle, the flowers, the piano, the divan) appear again, and the girls are variations on his sister in color, manner, or style. The claustrophobic configuration of

[97] For more on the concept of heterotopias and *Ada, Or Ardor*, see Kelvin Knight, *Real Places and Impossible Spaces: Foucault's Heterotopia in the Fiction of James Joyce, Vladimir Nabokov, and W.G. Sebald* (2014).

such places alludes to the fact that the past is replayed over and over again in the present as a negative experience as well.

Elana Gomel calls this form of literary microcosm 'fossils of the past,' associating it with 'new worlds' in tales of explorers, especially in Conan Doyle and Joseph Conrad. Gomel explains that primitive *loci* in exotic lands present unresolved tensions with historical time and social space (95). In Van's adventures, like those of the old explorers, he encountered different Floramours, where he could delight himself in an unmapped terrain and satisfy his unusual desire for innocent girls, projecting a foreign and exotic world embedded in the landscape of the real world, like the novel inside the novel. Interplanetary travel here finds a parallel in the time of the discoveries, suggesting that these 'other spatial and temporal' planes are not, in fact, outside time-space, but they are a microcosm, a cluster, that exacerbates some aspects of the macrostructures.

These correlated structures can also be observed in the resemblance between Eric and Van's respective biographies. The two men have more in common than just their names. Eric died in a hurricane when a roof tile hit him in the skull, and Van describes his first memories when, during an earthquake, a plaster ornament crashed into his cradle (419). Van was born in Ex, and Eric was buried there, in the grave next to Van's double. They both had, in their adolescence, unresolved sexual issues, sharing spiritual idiosyncrasies and an appetite for young girls. Throughout Chapter Two (Part two), the similarity between their whimsical minds becomes more and more striking. Van is actually continuing Eric's legacy, enjoying for him the possibilities he had imagined but could not experience. Van writes:

> Those preparations proceeded in such sustained, unendurably delicious rhythms that Eric dying in his sleep and Van throbbing with foul life on a

> rococo couch (three miles south of Bedford) could not imagine how these three young ladies, now suddenly divested of their clothes (a well-known oneirotic device) could manage to draw out of a prelude that kept one so long on the very lip of resolution. (*Ada* 278)

In this passage, it is clear that embedding time also works as a way of extending Van's foreplays, rhythmically sustaining the same pace for a long time without promoting difference and transformation. However, the parallels between Van and Eric also suggest that desire can cross time, fulfilling itself by identification. Scholars of queer temporalities call the pleasure derived from forging a sense of continuity with objects that are no longer present 'haunted time' (Freccero 2005) or "dragging time," pointing to the wish to reintroduce the past in the past.

2.6 Flickering Time and the Illusion of Timelessness

Marina Grishakova says that "the intention of Nabokov's protagonists in *Ada* is 'to live in the book,' i.e., to reach a pure timelessness of art" (106). I would argue that she is right. While Nabokov plays with several temporal layers and models, Van Veen wishes to stop time, and to return to his idyll with his sister, pathologically avoiding the present and the future.

There are several ways in which Nabokov reinforces Van's illusion of timelessness in *Ada*. Whereas in *Speak, Memory* he establishes imagery of the womb as a symbol for the circularity of femininity and nature's time – dialoguing with nineteenth-century notions of intimacy as ahistoricity – in *Ada*, Nabokov makes use of other literary resources. One of them is experienced on the discursive level. *Ada* features so many neologisms, word games and encrypted passages that the fluidity of the text is often obstructed. In other words, the reader dwells so much on some passages

that one might feel 'stopped' in time. In this same vein, D. Barton Johnson observes how Nabokov stops the movement of certain scenes as if the "fluid memory was frozen in time" to scrutinize visual details (133). He calls this "painter's view" (16), which is a common technique throughout *Ada*, but particularly telling in the following passage:

> [The] amplitude and animation of great trees [in Ardis Park] that had long replaced the two regular rows of stylized saplings (thrown in by the mind of the architect rather than observed by the eye of a painter) Van immediately recognized Ardis Hall as depicted in the two-hundred-year-old aquarelle that hung in his father's dressing room: the mansion sat on a rise overlooking an abstract meadow with two tiny people in cocked hats conversing not far from a stylized cow. (*Ada* 34)

By comparing the 'real' house with the aquarelle, Van not only collapses two temporal and spatial layers but also holds the scene's "amplitude and animation" hence transforming it into a static painting. Nevertheless, in Van's impetus to transform his own story into a monument, he often overkills the narrative with an excess of details, as this other passage demonstrates:

> One afternoon they [Van and Ada] were climbing the glossy-limbed shattal tree at the bottom of the garden. Mlle Larivière and little Lucette, screened by a caprice of the coppice but just within earshot, were playing grace hoops. One glimpsed now and then, above or through the foliage, the skimming hoop passing from one unseen sending stick to another. The first cicada of the season kept trying out its instrument. A silver-and-sable skybab squirrel sat sampling a cone on the back of a bench. (*Ada* 77)

In the excerpt above, the events are framed simultaneously, like in a picture, placed there by a "caprice of the coppice," in which even an unnoticed squirrel appears at the

end of the bench.[98] Although Van is the protagonist-narrator of the novel, which means the text should be restricted to his perspective, the passage above demonstrates that the focus of the novel is not always in line with his point of view. This either means that Van is an unreliable narrator, or that the focus in certain passages should be assigned to another entity altogether, probably as a mark of Nabokov's intrusion. Scrutinizing *Ada* even further, one might observe that Van not only alters his angle of vision to follow other characters, but he also jumps into their consciousness (*Ada* 17, 38, 68, 160, 161, 192, 198, 341). Many times, Van also changes his pronominal identification (*Ada* 40, 46, 266, 419, 445, 456) and spatial distance (*Ada* 150,164) in a constant protean metamorphosis.

Even if these strategies are often unnoticed by the reader, who tends to attribute a human perspective even to most improbable acts of narration, in *Ada*, the number of narrative metamorphosis is so abundant that one can quickly point to the non-verisimilitude of the text.[99] This intentional excess of liberty can be interpreted in the light of the postmodern tendency to replace "a humanistic narrator figure by irreducibly polymorphous acts of narration" (Alber et al. 356), playing with multiple forms of narrative embodiments and techniques.[100] As a result, though, the instability of the narrative world becomes a norm in *Ada, and Ardor*: places and things change, emerge and disappear throughout the novel according to the needs of the plot without any

[98] Several scholars comment on the presence of squirrels in *Pnin* (Toker 1898: 27-28), Rowe (1971: 62), Boyd (*AY* 284).

[99] Monika Fludernik calls attention to the difference between natural and unnatural forms of narrative. She explains that omniscient narrators, although conventionally accepted, give non-natural forms of narration as they extrapolate real-life schemes and individual consciousness. In the case of autobiographies, the detachment from the perspective of the 'I' might be accepted or not depending on the terms of the reader's expectations as boundaries are crossed continuously. In *Ada*, Nabokov intentionally extrapolates such conventions, projecting a protagonist-narrator that, at times, is limited to his embodied view but, at other times, is rumbling freely.

[100] Nabokov had already played with the difference between perspective and focalization before, a phenomenon that became famous in Gérard Genette's study of Marcel Proust as 'paralepsis' (1980: 202-203). Leone Toker noticed the presence of paralepsis in *Pnin* and other short stories, saying that Nabokov applies this recourse to present a competing point of view that is above the character's world (1986: 461).

reasonable explanation.[101] *Ada*'s paradise is, therefore, above all this extraordinary place, a protean paradise, without any compromise with the linearity and sequentiality of the historical world.

In this same vein, the repertoire of paradise images is another device used to distance the work's relationship with historical time. Van describes Ardis Manor as an idyll where he could freely enjoy love and sexuality, surrounded by exuberant nature, without the limits of morality, history, and contingency. As the very name of the protagonist suggests, both are depicted as Adam and Eve-like in paradise, falling from a shattal apple tree (77) or "frolicking naked" around the gardens and brooks experiencing countless sexual encounters (81).[102]

As many have already pointed out, Nabokov draws these images mostly from Hieronymus Bosh's famous triptych *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1490-1510), but also from Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667), Chateaubriand's *René* (1802), Lermontov's *Demon* (1839), and many other sources.[103] Nabokov also entangles mythological references with biblical ones, calling Ardis (arrow in Greek) to represent the arrow of the cupid that fulminates the three siblings, the "Children of Venus" (323). Due to Nabokov's playing with Garden of Eden and Expulsion from Paradise imagery, one gets the impression that the novel has no place in time, but exists only in how it is derived from art, literature, and popular tales.

Nabokov invests so much in this "timelessness" heaven that even the

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[101] Brian Boyd had already commented on the "absence of inert continuity" in *Ada*, explaining that a taxi is suddenly changed into a horse in one of the scenes (1985: 22).

[102] Will Norman has already noticed Nabokov's search for timelessness in *Ada*, saying, however, that he tries to evade history through references to Arcadian and pastoral texts, especially in the first part of the text. He explains that in the pastoral tradition, temporality is "either cyclical, governed only by the passing of the seasons, or else, in its Christian, prelapsarian incarnation, nonexistent. In both senses, it is crucially, historyless, and therefore free from contingencies associated with linear forms of time" (2012: 137). Norman concludes, however, that Nabokov's strategy fails to achieve this sense of timelessness because these pastoral texts, like Andrew Marvell's *The Garden*, situate Ada's idylls in a historical moment.

[103] In an interview, Nabokov calls the novel the "*Gardens of Delights*" (*SO* 306).

crossbreeding of words (portmanteau), flowers, and landscapes is presented to establish this sense of 'otherworldly.' The careful selection of phantasmagoric nomenclature, like Chateaubriand mosquitos (86), phantom orchids (155), butterflies orchids (461), and peacock moth (314) also emphasize the idea that Ardis is this extraordinary place, where extraordinary things happen. In doing this, Nabokov projects a landscape in which genes seem to be scrambled. Even the presence of orchids in the novel reinforces this notion of blending and amalgamations since this family of plants is the most prolific and yet the most easily crossed, coming to symbolize Ada and Van's incest. Not only several orchids are named and invented in the novel, but Ada also imagines new hybrids in her drawings. Eve Sedgwick had already pointed out how Proust uses the triangle of orchid-bee-orchid, in *La Race Maudite*, to describe "the crossing of boundaries of the individual, of genders, or of forms of life" (1990: 221). The prevalent trope of the novel, one might say, is not mimesis, mirroring, doubling, or reflection, as metafictional readings might suggest, but the blending of different geographies, species, and antinomies, i.e., *Ada* is not so much about opposites but about fusion and metamorphosis.

Ada, or Ardor's multiples temporalities—layering, collapsing, embedding, rewinding, flickering—are, in this token, also a compendium of erotic temporalities in constant metamorphosis. Elizabeth Freeman explains that, in the twentieth century, sexual dissidents came to be characterized by postmodern temporalities: asynchronies, belatedness, repetitions, and reversals, which rupture the notion of homogeneous time. This association between postmodernist temporalities and unconventional forms of sexuality arose, she explains, because these categories were forged in the same historical context. In the early twentieth century, "gay man, lesbians, and other 'perverts' have also served as figures *for* [damage] history," historically representing

"either civilization's decline or sublimely futuristic release from nature, or both" (2010: 7). These odd temporalities were understood as forms to "evacuate history," though not into a domestic timelessness identified with the female circularity, "but into a kind of cubist space, with time touching one another at odd angles" (57). Playing with postmodern temporalities, Nabokov also throws Van and Ada's incestuous story into a sort of cubist timelessness, in which different formats touch, reinforce, break apart, or reinforce each other.

2.7 *Ada*'s Erotic Texture of Time

Shortly before dying, Van Veen wonders about the meaning of life. He equates reality and memory, saying that they are "a complex system of those subtle bridges which the senses traverse…between membrane and brain" (*Ada* 174). Analyzing this short passage, one can conclude that for Van Veen memory is not merely an intellectual construction, nor is it an abstract form of consciousness; instead, it is a bridge formed by membrane (clearly evoking the female hymen) and brain. The encounter between these spheres—the 'incest' of the body and the mind—is the very essence of memory, he suggests.

In order to understand Van Veen's ideas about memory, it is worth considering Proust's notion of 'embodied memories' and Elizabeth Freeman's theory of 'erotohistoriography' (2010). In the famous madeleine scene, also known as the 'Proustian moment,' the protagonist explains how a lost childhood memory was suddenly awakened by the taste of a wet madeleine on his palate:

> No sooner had the warm liquid, and the crumbs with it, touched my palate than a shudder ran through my whole body, and I stopped, intent upon the extraordinary changes that were taking place. An exquisite pleasure had

> invaded my senses, but individual, detached, with no suggestion of its origin. And at once the vicissitudes of life had become indifferent to me, its disasters innocuous, its brevity illusory--this new sensation having had on me the effect which love has of filling me with a precious essence; or rather this essence was not in me, it was myself. I had ceased now to feel mediocre, accidental, mortal. Whence could it have come to me, this all-powerful joy? I was conscious that it was connected with the taste of tea and cake, but that it infinitely transcended those savours, could not, indeed, be of the same nature as theirs. Whence did it come? What did it signify? How could I seize upon and define it? (61)

In this passage, Marcel explains how he was able to describe with rich sensorial details a forgotten memory from his remote because of his bodily recollection (60). According to Marianne Leuzinger-Bohleber, such images are present in the works of Proust and many other writers, but it was only at the end of the twentieth century that psychoanalysis and cognitive science finally paid attention to sensory and not only motoric processes of memory (24). The reason for this historical negligence, Elizabeth Grosz explains, occurs because in the Cartesian separation between mind and body, the latter is given hierarchical superiority, especially in the context of scientific practices, in detriment of the nature of the corpus (1994: 8-9).

Freeman's concept of erotohistoriography arises in the context of queer theory and the turn to affect also a response to this historical negligence to the body. Her approach, however, is not only concerned with triggered memories 'on' the body, in which past events are recuperated like lost objects, but with the reinstatement of the body 'as' a method of history (2010: 95-100). Freeman's hypothesis makes more sense in the light of Fredric Jameson's famous claim that "history is what hurts," meaning that history is what refuses desire, and, in Freud-Marxist frame, produces trauma and

repression (1981: 102).[104] In opposition to historical materialism and the Protestant ethic, Freeman describes erotohistoriography as a renewed attention to enjoyable bodily sensations that produce new forms of historical consciousness. She finds in the eighteenth-century man of feeling an original moment during which the conjunction of mind and viscera inscribes sympathy as a refined instrument of comprehension (2010: 120). Freeman observes that the body (specifically the hands, lungs, and mouth) is not only the means by which the historian 'gets in touch' with the archive but, thanks to muscular memory, is itself a kind of archive that molds intelligible historical content. And this archive is by no means exclusively composed of traumas: in it are also idylls, utopias, erotic scenes, memories of touch, and so forth (2005: 121).

Applying erotohistoriography to *Ada, or Ardor*, one can say that Van Veen is haunted by his erotic and bodily memories with his sister: "he knew how agonizing and how absurd it was to put all one's spiritual fortune on one physical fancy" (*Ada* 387). Minor contacts, such as Ada's hair lightly touching his neck, are re-enacted over and over in his body. These re-enacted contacts, "so light, so brief, invariably proved to be beyond the dreamer's endurance and like a lifted sword signaled fire and violent release" (*Ada* 37). Van clearly alludes here to his bodily memories, making a vague reference to ejaculation ("violent release") after he remembers the touch of Ada's hair on his skin. These memories are not merely abstract and rational, but memories that are experienced physically, and they also produce physical results. Usually erotic, these tactile recollections can be tracked down to Van's first love, when he visits an antiquary at young age and touches a single humid rose (an obvious symbol for the vagina) among the artificial ones placed in a vase to trick the eyes. Even before he meets the girl

[104] In other words, History, as a discipline, has been traditionally organized by systems dominated by the masculine order (political, economical, socio-geographical facts), discrediting the events that take place in the body or in the private sphere as irrelevant because they are a mark of the female order.

responsible for this trick, he is already in love with her. Later, these first memories of tactile experience are reawakened when he sees Ada painting and fingering her orchids.[105] Van's bodily memories, however, are not always erotic in content. An elderly Van also explains he no longer remembers the license plate of his car, but he can feel, nevertheless, the asphalt under the front tires as if they were parts of his body (*Ada* 424), emphasizing this sort of corporeal remembrance again.[106]

Knowing that Van is obsessed with these sensual experiences, it is not a surprise that in *Texture of Time*, he describes his attempt to understand time in terms of touch and texture, as the title of his essay already indicates. He specifically says:

> I wish to caress Time… I delight sensually in Time, in its stuff and spread, in the fall of its folds, in the very impalpability of its grayish gauze, in the coolness of its continuum. I wish to do something about it; to indulge in a simulacrum of possession. (*Ada* 420)

Van explicitly says he wants to "caress" time and "spread" himself in it, focusing on tactile experiences and not on intellectual exercise. His erotic touch of time diverges, however, from conventional forms of sexuality as it takes place between a subject and thing, probably a malleable material because it is said to fold. Evoked here as a cold, gray gauze, Van's definition of the essence of time alludes to the popular Einsteinian

[105] Nabokov explains in one interview that it was only in *Ada, or Ardor* that he came to stress texture in its full potential: "[m]y creature [Van Veen] distinguishes between text and texture, between the contents of time and its almost tangible essence. I ignored that distinction in my *Speak, Memory* and was mainly concerned with being faithful to the patterns of my past" (*SO* 121). I conclude that Nabokov came to emphasize, in *Ada*, the idea of senses instead of visual or thematic patterns, which means that he changed his emphasis from the repetition of thematic lines to physiological sensations. This opposition between texture and content seems to be a reference to John Crowe Ransom's notion of argument and texture, developed in the context of new criticism. According to Ransom, poetry and prose should be analyzed through its "palpable and tangible details," "stylistic density," and "sensual richness," i.e., via the study of metaphors, meter, rhyme, and sounds in detriment of content. P. McCallum explains that in such point view "it follows that one important function of detail is precisely to *impede* the argument of the poem" (1430).

[106] In an interview with Alfred Appel, Nabokov says something similar in regard to his own memory: "I am an ardent memoirist with a rotten memory; a drowsy king's absent-minded remembrancer. With absolute lucidity I recall landscapes, gestures, intonations, a million sensuous details, but names and numbers topple into oblivion with absurd abandon like blind men in file from a pile" (1971: 214).

metaphor of the 'fabric' of time and space. On top of this, the opposition between the warmth of the skin and the coldness of the thing it touches completes a scene in which "the simulacrum of possession" invokes the techniques of bondage. In Van's philosophy, getting in touch with time can be unconventionally erotic.

The scene is overlaid with a succession of images that fortifies this impression. In a kind of gothic parody, Van calls time a "charmed castle," in which he "got lost in obscurity" on a dark and rainy night (*Ada* 420). He queerly defines his exploration of time as "degradingly difficult" and as a "physical torment" (ibid.), at odds with the straightforwardness of traditional rationality. Next, he compares his philosophical troubles with "rummaging with one hand in the glove compartment for the road map" (421)—a somewhat violent image whose symbolism evokes tactile carnal knowledge—"poking and tearing" the insides of time (ibid.). Finally, Van compares his attempt to understand time with Saint Augustine's. However, Augustine could, at least, "replenish his brain with God-dispersed energy" (ibid.), whereas Van, without God, is obscenely condemned to exhaustion.[107]

If understanding time is painful, the contact with history, on the other hand, is very pleasurable. When Van and Ada go through the past together, as a writer an editor of their life-archive, they simulate physical contact paragraph after paragraph, as a ghost of both textual intimacy as sexual intercourse. They reconstruct their sexual encounters to the reader—one should not forget that he 'talks' about his past as well as he 'hears' about it with Ada—but simultaneously they are also "fingering" the archive, rubbing themselves against those "dead" bodies (Freeman 2005: 60). In Van's description of Ardis Manor, for example, the mouth and hands are employed as tools

[107] David van Dusen explains that, for Saint Augustine, time and flesh are intrinsically interwoven, just like they are for Van. Augustine opens his reflection signaling the capacity to 'sense' time, although he is unable to measure it (230).

of historical recreation: "[y]ou could clip and kiss, and survey in between, the reservoir, the groves, the meadows, even the inkline of larches" (*Ada* 41). In Van's erotohistoriographical methodology, the documents of his past are to be scrutinized through the sexualized parts of the body, in particular, the thumb and index finger, establishing a parallel between the work of the historian and sexual foreplays.[108]

Nabokov had already noted the importance of the index finger as a part of his entomological studies: he derived particular pleasure from pinning the bodies of moths and butterflies, "the soaking, ice-cold absorbent cotton pressed to the insect's lemurian head; the subsiding spasms of its body; the satisfying crackle produced by the pin penetrating the hard crust of its thorax" (*SM* 87).[109] In this passage, Nabokov manipulates the body of moths and butterflies with a "satisfying" pleasure, and the textures involved in this process (soaking, ice-cold cotton, hard crust) are described with such detail that they almost trigger a sexual response in the reader as well, aligning here scientific work and sensuality. One might say that, for Nabokov, the interlocking manifestations of touch, sound and texture are a valid and pleasurable form of understanding. These synesthetic experiences are particularly eroticized because "touch is the ground for the articulation of orifices, erotogenic rims, cuts on the body surface, loci of exchange between the inside and the outside, points of conversion of the outside into the body, and the inside out of the body" (Grosz 1994: 36). Renu Bora confirms this, saying that texture takes erotic meaning when it combines visual, tactile, and gustatory sensations in order to index the qualities of an object. Texture depends on mutual shaping between the parts involved, Bora questions: "Did we caress the thing?

[108] Michelet, Barthes, and Foucault have also observed that bodily contact between the past and the present is frequently erotic in nature (Dinshaw, 1999: 47-52). Also see *Nabokov and Queer Theory*.
[109] When Van holds Ada's ankle "between finger and thumb as *she* would have a closed butterfly"(*Ada* 77), there is a clear association between entomological analysis and sexual enjoyment. I agree here with Rowe's association between a butterfly and a vagina, although Brian Boyd is against this sexual interpretation (Boyd 1985: 242).

Slightly touch it? Is it colder or warmer than the body? Is it seen from closer (pixels) or from afar (homogenous)? Is it a new (synthetic) or old material?" (95).

In this context, it is no accident that 'touch' becomes a trope of sexual excitement throughout *Ada, or Ardor*. In the famous breakfast scene, Ada spreads her fingers and licks the honey out off of them for Van's visual delectation (64). On another occasion, Ada bends over a table to make "tactile magic" out of a 'towering' house of cards; Van leans over her in anticipation of her sitting in his "hot hard hand" once the cards fall. Immediately after this comes to pass, Van runs to his room to masturbate (91-92). This scene is repeated in the library. Ada watches the burning barn from the library window; as soon as it collapses, she sits in his hands (95). Later, in a bed where they have just had sex, the couple 'manipulates' their servant Kim's photo album, a scene in which the metonymic connection between the past fixed in the photographs and the present is just as important as the relation between the movement between the index finger that presses the photographs into existence and the tactile play of ruffling pages. Kim is later blinded by Van, sentenced to a life of reading with his hands (311).[110]

Jenefer Shute, though, discusses voyeurism and striptease as a literary technique in both *Lolita* and *Ada*, explaining that the descriptive richness of the body connects the gaze of the male reader, the male protagonist, and the male author. Her analysis is unquestionably accurate, especially when it concerns the female object. Touch, on the other hand, establishes a parallel between Van's masturbation and his writing-reading

[110] Van explains that Ada's hands became an obsession for him (*Ada* 86) and that it is associated in his mind with Chateaubriand's mosquito bites. Like their sexual tension, the itch produced by the mosquito's bites is another form of bodily anguish that is relieved manually. At another moment he reiterates the centrality of fingers, saying: "[h]e discovered her hands (forget that nail-biting business). The pathos of the carpus, the grace of the phalanges demanding helpless genuflections, a mist of brimming tears, agonies of unresolvable adoration. He touched her wrist, like a dying doctor. A quiet madman, he caressed the parallel strokes of the delicate down shading the brunette's forearm. He went back to her knuckles. Fingers, please" (*Ada* 85).

processes. Just as they were for Joyce, 'hand jobs' are central to Van's intellectual formation. At a young age, Van masturbates to Catullus's lesbians "as soon as the kerosene lamp had left the mobile bedroom in his black nurse's fist" (*Ada* 57). The penis in Van's hand is transposed with that of the candle in his nurse's, forming a continuum between the solitary sexual act and the hand job of shuffling pages. "[T]here is nothing more splendid than lone thought" he proclaims elsewhere (*Ada* 423). Solitary pleasures are articulated onto the reader of his own forbidden *memoir*, who reads, according to Van, with a "secret tingle" in the secluded corner of the library where pornography is kept (*Ada* 173). As Leland De La Durantaye has already pointed out, both writing and autoeroticism require fantasy and solitude.[111] Not only that, literary activities and masturbation also occur as tactile manipulations, even more in the context of analogic technology and the materiality of the book (2007: 68). In light of this constant association between masturbation and the writing-reading process, it makes sense that Van writes about his torrid affair with his sister when he can no longer enact it. He projects, then, an image of the masculine reproductive member onto his 'pen,' aligning his hands with his member, and also suggesting that writing is a form of male signification.

Following the parallels between sexuality and writing-reading processes even further, on the penultimate page of the book, the protagonist says that the rhythm of *Ada, or Ardor* "proceeds at a spanking pace. Before we can pause to take breath and quietly survey the new surroundings into which the writer's magic carpet has, as it were,

[111] Durantaye explains that "[f]or Nabokov's reader, the interest of masturbation (apart from what James Joyce praised it for—its "amazing availability!"), is the key role it plays in a number of Nabokov's fictions—most centrally in *The Enchanter*, *Lolita*, and *Ada*. Viewed as a theme in Nabokov's work it involves three issues: one of *memory* in the evocation of earlier excitement, one of *actuality* in that the element of actuality is replaced by that of fantasy, and one of *solitude*. Less schematically, what is most at issue in *Lolita* is the role of the *image* as it is isolated from the real reel of life and spliced into the abstracted world of the imagination (2007: 68).

spilled us, another attractive girl" (*Ada* 460). Note again the imagery of hands, pain, and ejaculation, which mimic the tempo and sexual energy of the text. Like Van himself, the reader is first 'struck' by the difficulties of straight thought. With its many puns and literary games, with its layers of literary styles, the narrative is so densely constructed that the reader frequently experiences discomfort. But the pain of deciphering these codes is alleviated by the aesthetically pleasing and smooth passages of the text. Just as in a masochist test, the same hand that produces pain also produces relief. In other words, the writer is also a dominatrix.[112] It is as though Nabokov wants to tell us that he is 'impenetrable.' Like the protagonist, the reader is also somewhat castrated, unable to smoothly penetrate the text. As a result, s/he needs to first caress the words and sources and to touch the assemblage of fetishizing material (art, clothing, furniture, sources, architecture, concepts) in order to engage with it, a hermeneutic-erotic technique that is reinforced by the parallels between the textual corpus and the human corpus.

No wonder that touch and taste are combined more frequently in *Ada, or Ardor* than in any of Nabokov's previous works. Hamburger, milk, tea, honey, sugar, whisky, candied fruits, cakes, beer, and cinnamon are all pixels in Nabokov's double portrait of gluttony and lust which calls to mind, at times, the wet and messy fetish (WAM) of sploshing.[113] It makes sense then that Van defines time in terms of texture as well as in terms of rhythm, which is an idea he most likely borrows from Bergson: "[m]aybe the only thing that hints at a sense of Time is rhythm; not the recurrent beats of the rhythm but the gap between two such beats, the gray gap between black beats: the Tender Interval" (*Ada* 421). Both of these forms are sexually complementary: texture is

[112] Nabokov's authorial 'sadism' is well remarked upon, as I commented before. See *Overview*.

[113] This fetish could be described as a form of sexual pleasure that derives from the texture, temperature, and sound produced by the contact of the body with external materials, especially food. See *Deviant Desires: Incredibly Strange Sex!* by Katharine Gates (2000).

described as anxiously erotic, while rhythm provides a tender pace. Texture appears either as intellectual friction with the past (and with pages of the book), or evoked in the anxious contact of Van's member with the fabric of his trousers, "decently swathed in layers of linen and wool" (*Ada*, 89), or in his endless fetishizing descriptions of clothing. Unlike texture, rhythm is a maternal nudge, "neither too slow nor too fast," that derives from domestic rituals (breakfast, lunch, baths, sleeping) or natural phenomena (the seasons). The experience of time as rhythm is that of a body synchronized with nature. The conjunction of the fireflies and the throb of Van's penis; the swing of the hammock and the stars above (*Ada* 62), which project an alignment between nature and self: "Venus rose in this sky; Venus set in his flesh" (*Ada* 61).

What Van seems to be suggesting is that texture and rhythm are the very essence of both, Eros and Time. The philosophical-scientific treatise re-enacts such structures in its own composition, allowing the reader not only to think about time but also to experience it as an uncanny sexual encounter with the text. *Ada*, one might say, is an invitation to a feast of sploshing with the text and with time's multiple existences. After reading *Ada*, we might not understand what time means, but we definitely will have experienced it at exhaustion in its multiple ups and downs, loops, and layers.

2.8 Sp*eak, Memory*: Search for Timelessness

In *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (2010), Elizabeth Freeman explains that time is a gendered and a class system. Addressing Julia Kristeva's "Women's Time" (1981), Freeman claims that two temporal dimensions have organized the modern Western thought: on the one hand, the linear, historical and cursive time, usually associated with masculinity; and, on the other hand, the monumental or cyclic time marked by repetitions of the 'female' cycles and biological

rhythms. In the context of the industrial revolution and the nineteenth-century cult of intimacy, these differences were exacerbated. She writes:

> Family time, as it emerged, moved a formally religious ritual time into women's domain, replaced sacred time with the secular rhythms of capital, feminized the temporalities considered to be outside of the linear, serial, end-directed time of history…This secularized cyclical time, in turn, offered a new version of monumental time. Within the ideology of normative domesticity, the proper maintenance of cyclical schedules and routines produces the effect of timelessness […] By the mid-twentieth-century, bourgeois mothers and their behind-the-scenes servants were responsible for what Thomas Elsanaer has described as the aesthetic of still life, a tranquil household marked by not only visual order, but also smooth transitions, recurrent rituals, and safety from accidents and ultimately intrusion from the outside world. (40)

In saying this, Freeman explains how the illusion of timelessness experienced inside the household system became a historical construction to liberate men from their class habitus and labor schedule, "renewing their bodies for reentry the time of mechanized production and national destinies" (5). This feeling of timelessness is marked by the conventional ideal of female sensibility: tenderness, smoothness, warm, touch, and cyclical repetitions, which give a sense of reconnection with the internal time and the time of nature. Freeman notes that, in French feminist scholarship, these temporal systems are also understood as projections inside the body: while the male pleasure occurs as momentary bliss, ejaculation, and fast movements, schematically reproducing the mechanical system of work, female sexuality, anal eroticism, and sadomasochism multiply and spatialize pleasure onto the body (49). If this interpretation is somewhat essentialist, stressing the rift between masculine and feminine order, it opens,

nevertheless, a discussion between bodily pleasure and temporality, which was absent in the "ephemeral, urban, quickie encounters […] available so much more often for men than to women" (50).

This bodily and gendered temporal system is at the center of Nabokov's autobiography *Speak, Memory* and his search for timelessness. According to him, *Speak, Memory* was a new kind of autobiography which lands somewhere between the record of life and a novel, in which facts are organized by "artistic design" instead of chronology (*AY* 149). He insists, right from the beginning, that "the true purpose of autobiography" (*SM* 12) is the evolution and repetition of a theme, suggesting that his artistic and intellectual work should be above any interpretation of individual life, clearly separating the universe of the mind (intellectual masculinity) from the mundane facts of ordinary life.

Following his typical metafictional style and masculine tendencies, Nabokov dialogues with several the fatherly figures, from Saint Augustine, Rousseau, Wordsworth, and Marcel Proust, implicitly making comments on the *genre* of autobiography itself, as if he were responding to his male tradition. From Saint Augustine, for example, Nabokov has borrowed the philosophical comments on the nature of time and memory, slightly resembling Book XI of the *Confessions* (AD 397-400). Nabokov, however, follows the example of Rousseau's secular *Confessions* (1782), when he transposes to man or nature "the power to know or see inside the self that once resided with God" (L. Anderson 44).[114] Different from Rousseau, who believed that he could be authentic, Nabokov refused to offer a complete view of his soul, aesthetically re-creating his past (Boyd 2011: 277). The literary re-elaboration of

[114] Georges Nivat compares Nabokov's rhetoric, in *Speak, Memory*, with mythological texts and epics, observing how he associates his life with comets and eclipses (678).

facts links *Speak, Memory* to Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, as if both were in a quest for the buried past to transform it into a monument, a form of nostalgia and a natural ground for identity (Louria 1974; Wood 1994). Nabokov invests so much in describing his artistic talent that he seems to be crafting an image of a special man, among other brilliant men from the Western tradition, fetishizing once again a male tradition.[115]

Despite this emphasis on patterns, intellectual work, and fatherly figures, inlaid in *Speak, Memory* is Nabokov's search for timelessness. Different from the majority of his scholarship, I do not identify this timelessness world as a metaphysical projection of another (better) place, but as a wish to return to his motherly security, as a trope that Nabokov borrows from the nineteenth-century cult of intimacy as timelessness, in Kristeva's and Freeman's theory. In the opening scene of the autobiography, he offers the reader the most prevalent image of his early life: a shiny spot between two dark cracks, which are, according to him, pre-birth and death respectively. He repeats countless times along the text, the idea of "divine" light, glimpses of revelation in the darkness. This schematic opposition between dark and light, mundane and otherworldly, are connected with the classical religious mythology of revelations and transcendence, but, in his autobiography, it also brings forth a 'fantasy of the womb,' which is this imagined feminine place of origin.

The 'rhetoric of the womb' is replayed over and over again in *Speak, Memory*: Nabokov found "fantastic pleasure" in building tunnels or tents at home, crawling around the room until he finds the lighted exit (*SM* 8). He sucks the tips of the sheets to see a crystal egg on the other side (*SM* 9); he also observes the colored lights of his St.

[115] Zinaida Shakhovskaia indeed identified in him snobbish egocentrism and class pride, also noting the overwhelming ignorance of other "social worlds, […] domestics, and the absence of real peasants" (qtd. in Nivet 677).

Petersburg's street through the window (*SM* 19); and travels on trains, watching the city lights with amazement through the dusky night (SM 107). These memories might not bear any logical connection with each other, but they share a common tactile and delicious feeling of being in a dark spot, peering to the other side.

In Mademoiselle's rooms, for example, Nabokov liked to snuggle in the nooks because he felt so "warm and secure" (*SM* 76). In these places, Nabokov had a "sense of security, of well-being, of summer warmth" (*SM* 52). Frequently, he could achieve this feeling of happiness on summer days with a drizzle. Humidity, warmth, and sunlight compose Nabokov's paradise: the image of his mother on a mushroom hunt on a wet day with dripping trees (*SM* 24-25); his strolls with Tamara on rainy days around Vyra (*SM* 157); and his first poetical composition after a rainstorm (*SM* 164). The "blend of damp moss, rich earth and rotting leaves" (*SM* 24) form a perfect ground not only for the blooming of nature but also for Nabokov's intellectual and sensual growth.

No wonder that Nabokov describes these tunnels and knocks as a suffocating but rather delightful experience—a "delicious panic," alluding to a scene of asphyxiation (*SM* 8). He "gropes" for the exit of human time into clear timelessness, but he feels a wall. Nabokov beats his fists against it while he writes, but time is a spherical prison (placenta?) (*SM* 6). It is not an accident that when Nabokov describes the timelessness world of his childhood, he paints it as a radiant and mobile medium, in which "excited bathers share shining seawater" (*SM* 7) with other creatures, suggesting an almost ecological view of being 'in the uterus' with others. He continues building this image, saying that the cosmos could be held inside of a kangaroo's pouch (*SM* 9), and, later, he talks about his childhood happiness as "fissures" in time and "missing heartbeats," gently evoking the moment of birth (*SM* 164). In this light, Nabokov's idea of "cosmic synchronization"—when "heart and leaf were one," also

described as “a sense of oneness with the sun and stone” (*SM* 103)—can also be considered a form of pregnancy, when humans temporally commingle with others through the female biological apparatus. The whimsical aspect of such imagery of the womb is that it evokes a form of ‘inside-out’ time (as if being alive entails consciousness during gestation) and an expectation to be reborn after death, linking Nabokov’s notions of transcendence with female cyclic time.

Nabokov’s mouth plays a particularly important role when he relives the tenderness that his lips used to feel kissing his mother’s veiled cheek after she returned from a stroll (*SM* 20). As typical in the romantic notion of sentimentality, touch is particularly foregrounded here. This memory, he says, “*flies* back to me with a shout of joy out of the snow-blue, blue windowed (the curtains are not yet drawn) past” (ibid.). Later, he re-enacts this experience in Saint Petersburg, when he presses his lips “against the thin fabric that veiled the windowpane” of his mother’s room to “taste the cold of the glass through the gauze” (*SM* 61). It is clear that, on both occasions, Nabokov is protected inside the house while his mouth detects the cold from the outside, suggesting again a warm womb-like feeling of security that is deliciously reassuring.

Femininity here is classically combined with touch, tenderness, and pleasure, although the female body is disembodied in its representation as “Mother Nature” (*SM* 173). William Wordsworth’s semi-biographical poem *The Prelude* (1850) also projects a disembodied and pre-sexual mother onto nature, eliminating, therefore, the notion of female otherness. Linda Anderson explains that Wordsworth’s biography presents the heroic quest of the poet trying to separate himself from the mother, paradoxically opening up an insurmountable desire to return to the maternal source of origin (58). Nabokov projects a similar desire when he idealizes his motherland and Russia’s natural countryside as places outside time, where he experienced a sense of idyll up to

the point of his forced immigration. Nabokov's constant wish to return to the past underscores a masculine desire to control the female body and 'female' time, trying to arrest both in his present, revealing his dependency to the mother and his residual femininity.

In the context of *Speak, Memory*, this means that timelessness is not a metaphysically special place, as Nabokov claims imitating Augustine's philosophical tone, but a physical urge to return to the illusion of a 'womb.' Facing the impossibility of this regress, Nabokov tries to reconstruct these feelings of security in adult life, finding in his writings and butterfly hunting a surrogate for his childhood idyll. It is not an accident that Nabokov describes several "moments of transformation" in his life when he eschews typical male features to favor mystical and sensitive ones, characteristics culturally considered female. He explains, for example, that he had gained the ability to visualize the future, a "mind dilation effect" (*SM* 20), and also, miraculously, had lost his mathematical genius (*SM* 89), later being rewarded with poetic creativity and colored hearing: a form of synesthesia in which words have color, trying to emphasize his sensibility as an author.

The constant presence of his mother, also in the form of his motherland, signals to the formative importance of female presence in his life—although Brian Boyd highlights the death of his father as a crucial moment for Nabokov's intellectual formation (Boyd 2011: 176).[116] Almost invisible is Nabokov's dependency to the female order, pointing to his fear of expressing his dependency and yet a fear of losing this pleasurable sense of timelessness. In doing this, Nabokov underscores a desire to occupy a female and male function in his writing, combining the motherly (in the

[116] The original name of *Speak, Memory*—"Speak, Mnemosyne"—indicates more explicitly the importance of the mother's presence, as Mnemosyne means memory, the mother of the muses.

impersonal language, nature, and culture) with his fatherly predecessors. No wonder Nabokov combines feminine "touch" and intellectual work but always emphasizes the second in detriment of the first, as if being associated with female social attributes—more specifically emotions and dependency—are a form of treachery to his works.

The opposition between internal darkness/protection and external light/mystery is transposed, even further, into Nabokov's process of writing when he construes his memories for the reader. In other words, he makes us feel like we are in a dark spot, peering like a spectator in the cinema at the luminous screen/stage of his past, replaying the womb-like feeling again at the level of the discourse. From the very first page, the imagery of cinema is present. Nabokov introduces his hazy past as an old and ragged movie through which he and we can observe his mother symbolically waving at him, and a coffin-like baby carriage, connecting his birth with his death (*SM* 9), projecting a form of circularity again. The past then opens itself like a curtain before the reader's eyes, establishing a connection between his mother's veil and the screen through which we see his past. When Nabokov moves into the presentation of his genealogical family in Chapter Three, his rhetoric changes from movies to paintings, photography, and blazons. The reader is guided through a museum of portraits, dates, and names in which Nabokov presents the main physical features of his relatives on both sides of his family as if he were observing paintings in a receding corridor (*SM* 33). At other moments, Nabokov invites us to participate in his staged past like in a theater: "come out to meet me as I re-enter my past" (*SM* 59). He presents characters along the way and even personifies his memory as if it were a character in a metafictional play: "[a] large, alabaster-based kerosene lamp is steered into the gloaming. Gently it floats and comes down; the hand of memory, now in a footman's white glove, places it in the center of a round table" (*SM* 70). The spectacle of Nabokov's adolescence ends only when the

Bolshevik revolution "turned off the lights" (*SM* 128). Using these figurative techniques, Nabokov is not only directing his past but also dramatizing the means by which we access his memory, evoking tactile and visual feelings that resemble the secure and warm spots in his childhood.

In Chapter Eight, the media changes again, this time from theater to "magic slides" in a homely projection (*SM* 114). The tactile climax of this chapter occurs when Nabokov gets in touch with the slides brought by a tutor for an educational presentation:

> Now that I come to think of it, how tawdry and tumid they looked, those jellylike pictures, projected upon the damp linen screen (moisture was supposed to make them blossom more richly) but, on the other hand, what loveliness the glass slides as such reveled when simply held between finger and thumb and raised to the light—translucent miniatures, pocket wonderlands, neat little worlds of hushed luminous hues! In later years, I rediscovered the same precise and silent beauty at the radiant bottom of a microscope's radiant magic shaft. (*SM* 125)

This passage combines several elements I wish to highlight. First, he evokes a sense of dampness and the luminous projection, which were present in his womb-like memories. Beyond that, the inversion of scales evokes a child's viewpoint (close to the floor or close to the rocks on the beach), transposing the child's perception into reality itself.[117] Not only that, Nabokov connects his childhood slides with his microscope's observations in adult life, suggesting that both have a common pleasurable bodily experience.

[117] The exercise of observing something small is particularly pleasurable for Nabokov and tends to awaken his memory. This can be observed in the crystal ornament of a penholder: "one held it close to one's eye, screwing up the other, and when got rid of the shimmer of one's eyelashes, a miraculous photographic view of the bay and of the line of the cliffs ending in a lighthouse could be seen. And now a delightful thing happens. The process of recreating that penholder and the microcosm in its eyelet stimulates my memory to a last effort" (*SM* 112).

In Chapter Ten, Nabokov finally presents to the reader his sexual awakening: the discomfort that he felt close to women, which made him sexually aroused ("clammy consciousness") and yet puzzled (*SM* 159). It becomes clear that Nabokov indeed had a problem with the trite aspects of the female body, especially concerning dirt, and also felt uneasy with the sexual feelings generated by looking at the bodies of women: "I soon noticed that *any* evocation of the female form would be accompanied by the puzzling discomfort already familiar to me" (*SM* 157). He describes these moments as romantic agitations, and although these passages are sexually charged, they are not erotic because Nabokov disguises sexual content as poetical creation, clearly avoiding a direct description of his desire.

One scene is particularly telling: when Nabokov reads his first literary creation about his love for Tamara to his mother. He writes:

> Never had I been more vulnerable. My nerves were on edge because of the darkness of the earth, which I had not noticed muffling itself up, and the nakedness of the firmament, the disrobing of which I had not noticed either. Overhead, between the formless trees bordering my dissolving past, the night sky was pale with stars. In those years, that marvelous sense of constellations, nebulae, interstellar gaps and all the rest of the awesome show provoked in me an indescribable sense of nausea, of utter panic, as if I were hanging from earth upside down on the brink of infinite space, with terrestrial gravity still holding me by the heels but about to release me any moment. (*SM* 171-172)

Nabokov is not only informing his mother that he is a poet; he is also informing her about his love affair and how he was becoming an adult through both endeavors. Nabokov felt suffocated by the pressure of exposing himself so openly. The sky, like a woman, is pale, naked, and disrobed, suggesting that he faces the firmament as he faces

the object of sexual desire. The author feels an utter sense of disembodiment, an "evaporated identity" (172), which alludes to the panic created by the magnitude of outer space and by the loss of his initial security in the female nest. Just like as in Wordsworth, Nabokov traversed a path from the maternal security to the voids of sexual life or to the void of the *émigré* life, which is detached from the security of the female womb, his home, and his homeland. One might conclude that Nabokov urges for security, stability, grounding, which he calls timelessness, placing his autobiography as a surrogate for his childhood.

Part 03: *Texture of Time*: Queering Intertextuality

"I am an impure philosopher, said Van, I see the human being through the tract."

(*Notes For Texture of Time*, unpublished)

3.1 Thinking Erotically about Time

It is common knowledge that Nabokov took more than 10 years to come to terms with *Ada, or Ardor*. From 1957 to 1968, he researched the nature of time from a scientific and philosophic point of view, which culminated in the book's fourth part, *Texture of Time*. In 1959, he had already sketched some notes to *Letters from Terra,* which would have influenced the first and second part of *Ada* (*AY* 502). It was, however, only in February 1966 that both projects collapsed into one when Nabokov imagined the scene of the telephone call in the penultimate part of the novel (*SO* 122).

This combination of fictional text with an investigation on the nature of time has been considered one of the hallmarks of the European modernism, and it was also part of the postmodernist spatialization of time. Marcel Proust and James Joyce have not only explored time from an artistic and subjective point of view, but also from a philosophic and scientific perspective, making references either to Henri Bergson's durational theory (1889) or J. W. Dunne's *An Experiment with Time* (1927).[118] Observing this philosophical tendency *In Search of Lost Time*, Nabokov even says that "Proustian ideas are colored editions of the Bergsonian thought" (*LL* 208).[119] Jorge Luis Borges's *A New Refutation of Time* (1944-1946) transforms this modernist discussion into a quasi-philosophical essay, returning to Bergson and Dunne, but yet adding references to Zeno, Saint Augustine, Berkeley, Hume, and Einstein. Borges' goal is to prove that time does not exist, but is, paradoxically, undeniable:

> Time is the substance I am made of. Time is a river which sweeps me along, but I am the river; it is a tiger which destroys me, but I am the tiger; it is a fire

[118] See Mark Antliff, *Inventing Bergson: Cultural Politics and the Parisian Avant-Garde* (1993) to understand the importance of Bergson to European modernism.
[119] For more on Proust and Bergson see Peter A. Y. Gunter, "Proust and Bergson: A Question of Influence" (2013).

which consumes me, but I am the fire. The world, unfortunately, is real. I, unfortunately, am Borges. (221)

In the closing lines of his essay, Borges claims that time might be philosophically illogical, but is nevertheless so directly related to our individual existence and language that no one can deny its existence without negating the self.

These literary works were part of a broader debate on the nature of time that took place at the beginning of the twentieth century. This discussion revolved, primarily, but not exclusively around Einstein and Bergson and was concerned with whether time was a perceptual or a physical phenomenon; and whether space was indeed related to time as Einstein famously claimed.[120] In 1922, the same year that Van Veen was drafting *Texture of Time*, Henri Bergson and Albert Einstein met at the *Société Française de Philosophie* in Paris (Mullarkey and Pearson 26). It was the first time the two Nobel laureates had appeared together in public, and their encounter was the impetus for numerous reflections by the scientific community on the "problem of time and space." [121] It was a critical moment for the epistemological rift between the humanities and hard science. It is generally believed that the philosopher "lost" to the physicist that day since Bergson failed to comprehend fundamental aspects of Einstein's theory, especially the concept of simultaneity and the twin paradox thought experience (Canales 23). Already an old man,

[120] In the preface to *Space, Time and Deity* (1920), Samuel Alexander attests to this historical change. "At the present moment," he wrote, "the special question of the exact relation of Time to Space has been forced into the front, because Time has recently come into its full rights, in science through the mathematical physicists, in philosophy also through Prof. Bergson" (36). The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1947), one of Nabokov's major sources, explains this change in thought as follows: "[t]he theory of relativity has brought about a fundamental change in the scientific conception of space and time, described in a famous saying of Hermann Minkowski – 'From henceforth space in itself and time in itself sink to mere shadows, and only a kind of union of the two preserves an independent existence'…If, therefore, we wish to grasp the essence of a complex of abstract notions we must for the one part investigate the mutual relationships between the concepts and the assertions made about them; for the other, we must investigate how they are related to the experiences" (Space-Time 103Z).

[121] Prigogine and Stengers explain the intellectual *zeitgeist* thus: "(t)he resulting dichotomy between time felt and time understood is a hallmark of scientific-industrial civilization, a sort of collective schizophrenia," which later was progressively re-worked as "(t)ime has penetrated not only biology, geology, the social sciences but also two levels from which it has been traditionally excluded, the microscopic and the cosmic" (214-215).

Bergson seemed to represent the impossibility of philosophy keeping up with new technological and scientific discoveries (ibid.).[122]

Texture of Time is deeply rooted at this moment and it could be considered a defense of Bergson in opposition to Einstein. Bergson's name is mentioned at least five times in the novel along with other famous and not so famous twentieth-century thinkers like Hermann Minkowski, Eugène Minkowski, G. J. Whitrow, Samuel Alexander, Julius Thomas Fraser, Henri Piéron, among many others. Van Veen builds his career, in part, as a disciple of Bergson and he openly mentions the concept of duration, and Bergson's famous separation between time and space from the opening pages of *Time and Free Will* (1889). Nabokov's 'answer' to the problem of time, however, came quite late, almost forty years after Proust's and Joyce's, and twenty years after Borges'. This long period of rumination, Bozovic explains, is a sign of Nabokov's belatedness and it highlights his wishes to the part of the modernist tradition, a peer of Proust and Joyce, rearranging "the Western canon to position himself and the Russian literary tradition as central and either ahead of its time, or safely immortal" (141).[123] Nabokov might have been motivated by his "anxiety of influence" in regard to these icons, but this impulse says little about how Nabokov returns to his tradition. His late perspective, in fact, might have been an advantage for Nabokov, who is able to safely manipulate both traditions, literary and scientific simultaneously, in rather playful and erotic ways.[124] This is what I will investigate in this chapter.

[122] See Milič Čapek to understand the problems and the contributions of Bergson's thought to new physics, *Bergson and Modern Physics: A Reinterpretation and Re-evaluation* (1971).
[123] According to Bozovic, "Nabokov faced the same problem as had Samuel Beckett: how to write after Joyce and Proust?"(18).
[124] The majority of the authors cited in *Texture of Time* were already dead by the time Nabokov published the novel. See *Nabokov and New Physics*.

3.2 General Problems

In an interview with Robert Hughes given four years before the publication of the *Ada*, Nabokov made the following remarks about his "next work:"

> The difficulty about it is that I have to devise an essay, a scholarly-looking essay on time and then gradually turn it into the story I have in mind. The metaphors start to live. The metaphors gradually turn into the story because it's very difficult to speak about time without using similes or metaphors. And my purpose is to have these metaphors breed to form a story of their own, gradually, and then again to fall apart, and to have it all end in this rather dry though serious and well-meant essay on time. It proves so difficult to compose that I don't know what to do about it. (*AY* 487)

This comment highlights some of the many general and hermeneutical problems involved in the text. One can ask: Is *Texture of Time* a dry, but a serious treatise on the nature of time, as Nabokov suggests? Or is *TT* only a structural device of the plot, like Kinbote's commentary on Shade's poem? Or even, is *TT* merely an unsystematic compilation of information, which demonstrates Nabokov's difficulties in dealing with theory and science? Following this train of thought, one might also ask whether *Texture of Time* represents Nabokov's own ideas or only those of Van Veen?[125]

Specialists have either ignored these problems or presented discrepant accounts. Will Norman aligns Nabokov with Van Veen. For "all its literary brilliance," he writes,

[125] In regard to the relationship between the treatise and the novel, the matter is rather confusing as well. Nabokov said to Alfred Appel that "my *Texture of Time*, now almost half-ready, is only the central rose-web of a much ampler and richer novel, entitled *Ada*, about passionate, hopeless, rapturous sunset love, with swallows darting beyond the stained window and that radiant shiver" (*SO* 91). This would mean that *TT* indeed holds the essence of the book. Bozovic confirms that *Ada* is an illustration of Van's scientific treatise (214); Charles Nicol believes that *TT* refers concretely to Van's drive through the Alps and not to the whole novel (2003: 91-92). I argue that *TT* and the novel are complementary, but, for me, the treatise is not an extension of the novel. The theory elaborated by Van directly contradicts the idea of time as a lived and erotic experience, which is at the center of the novel.

Texture of Time "is a comic failure" (2012: 1), the implication being that both author and character have equally stumbled in presenting a cogent scientific-philosophical theory. Anne Zeller defends the position that Van Veen is Nabokov's authorial spokesman: if Van Veen is *V.V.* Nabokov, it follows that *TT* expresses the view of Nabokov himself (283). Adam Barrow, however, detaches Nabokov and Van Veen, claiming that *TT* is a parody of Bergson's writing on time and that Nabokov wants to rehabilitate the philosopher's discredit for spatial elements (95).

However, in 1968, a year before the publication of the book, Nabokov answered the question "How do you see time?" by saying that,

> [m]y new novel (now 800 typed pages long) is a family chronicle, mostly set in a dream America. Of its five parts one is built around *my* notion of time. I've drawn my scalpel through spacetime, space being the tumor, which I assign to the slops. While not having much physics, I reject Einstein's slick formulae; but then one need not know theology to be an atheist. (*SO* 116, *italics mine*)

Here Nabokov seems to claim *Texture of Time* as his own but in another interview with Martha Duffy and R.Z. Sheppard conducted a few days after the publication of *Ada* (May 5, 1969) he explained that talkative characters tend to only to resemble their authors, adding that, personally, he loathed Van Veen, thus categorically dis-identifying himself from his creation. According to him, Van lost control over his own imagination and *Texture of Time* is merely a "savant's tussle with a recondite riddle" (*SO* 121).

On October 23, 1969, the situation became even more complicated. Nabokov told James Mossman: "I have not decided yet if I agree with him [Van Veen] in all his views on the texture of time. I suspect I don't" (*SO* 143). Finally, in 1971, two years after the novel was published, Nabokov seemed to make up his mind: "[h]e and I in that

book attempt to examine the *essence of time*" (*SO* 185-186) in opposition to 'applied time,' that is time as studied by historians and physicists. In the same year, Nabokov said, "[m]y conception of the texture of time somewhat resembles its image in Part Four of *Ada*. The present is only the top of past, and the future does not exist" (*SO* 184).

It is rather confusing. As a character, Van Veen seems to be another one of Nabokov's "galley slave[s]" (*SO* 95). While the protagonist experiments with the concept of time, Nabokov can safely judge the validity of *TT* or lack thereof from behind the shield of fiction. In other words, in ascribing these thoughts to a fictional entity, Nabokov can, in time, agree or disagree with them, as he did. Unable to decide precisely what Nabokov's intentions were with regard to *TT*, one might reasonably conclude that the treatise is a strategic device.[126] It is a "scholarly-looking" essay, as he says (*AY* 487), but not a philosophical piece. Nabokov 'teases' our desire for science and the wholeness of intellectual thought, however impeding a scientific approach to it. *Texture of Time* is not 'science' so much as it is 'science drag,' which seems to pander to the fetish for intellectual investigations that, in the end, can never be satisfied by such an incomplete text. *Texture of Time* is not even Van's final word on the matter: Part Four is only a first draft, sketched while Van is traveling through the Alps (*Ada* 442). The character (or Nabokov himself?) misleads the reader into imagining that s/he could actually analyze the propositions of the novel, and the given theories, as a serious scientific text. In fact, Van frustrates any attempt to find a "solution" to the problem of time, presenting a Frankenstein's monster of a theory that looks like a philosophical treatise but is not.[127]

[126] Along this chapter, I will explain the differences between Nabokov and Van's concept of time.

[127] This reference to 'science drag' can also be read as a sadomasochist play. As Studlar explains, "the sadomasochist text relies on suggestive descriptions and narrative suspense enacted through games of disguised and tantalizing pursuit, implying gratification forever postponed to the future" (21).

This was not the first time Nabokov had performed this particular methodical-erotic gesture, teasing the reader for scientific rigidity. In *Strong Opinions*, Nabokov describes his model of the "good reader," who should read his literary texts with the rigor and precision of science (*SO* 7), caressing and analyzing the details of the work as an object in the microscope. Furthermore, *The Gift* also presents a poetical-scientific essay, just like *Texture of Time*, entitled "Father's Butterflies." This appendix is so hermetic that one can hardly determine its scientific validity without stumbling into the sensuous richness of the language used by the protagonist. In both cases—*Texture of Time* and *Father's Butterflies*—Nabokov seems to be using details and metaphoric imagery as a way of impeding the argument of the essay, as if the poetical texture of the treatises would be able to release meanings "caught in the over-coded structure of grammar" or philosophical thought (McCallum 1430).[128]

Nabokov was, nevertheless, deeply committed in his investigation on the nature of time. He makes comments on, at least, 50 thinkers from the beginning of the twentieth century that had addressed the problem of time and space, and this long research throws some light into Nabokov's confusing approach to science.

3.3 Touching on the Archive: *Notes for Texture of Time*

Notes for Texture of Time (1957-68) is a manuscript of the Berg Collection in the New *York Public Library,* which I accessed in December 2015. It is composed of 137 index cards that Nabokov divided into 11 subcategories. He titled each section on the upper part of each card. These subtopics are: space, measurements/clocks, past, time, present,

[128] In another chapter of *The Gift*, one of the characters, Koncheyev, goes to the trouble of finding the exact same copy of a book the protagonist had read, finding Fyodor's cigarette ash in the pages (339). This scene invites the reader to do the same, i.e., to compare the fictional text to the scientific source in order to find extraordinary details and coincidences.

relativity, simultaneous events, spirals, future, Whitrow, and Saint Augustine.[129] There are also a couple of loose cards, which are not placed in any of the above categories. He names the authors, pages, and editions consulted. Nabokov also marks his reactions to the authors: "nonsense," "absurd," "false," "good work," "ponder this," "find another comparison," etc. Eventually, he crosses out excerpts with a red pencil and notes them "used" or "partly used." By comparing *Texture of Time* to the *Notes*, I compiled a list of more than 50 theorists, mentioned either on the cards or in Chapter Four of *Ada* (see Appendix 8.1 and 8.2). Some are Nabokov's primary sources, while others are mentioned second-hand, such as Hermann Minkowski, whose theories Nabokov seems to have encountered through Whitrow.

Most of the authors listed in *Notes for Texture of Time* were involved in the Bergson-Einstein debate, providing their own interpretations to time's existence. They were British mathematicians, astrophysicists, or philosophers of science (e.g., Whitrow, Whitehead, Eddington, Alexander, McTaggart, and Gunn). Many were affiliated with Oxford or Trinity College (Cambridge), either as students or professors. Nabokov also included French psychologists or philosophers (Bergson, Fraisse, Piéron, Pierre Janet, Guyau and Eugène Minkowski) in conjunction with important German physicists (Albert Einstein and Hermann Minkowski).

Judging from the manuscript available today, Gerald James Whitrow (1912–2000) was one of Nabokov's major sources. *Notes* contains 21 scattered references to Whitrow's volume, and Nabokov even writes "Good work," on the top of one of his index cards (*NTT*, Whitrow Oct. 1964).[130] Nabokov received his copy of Whitrow's *The Natural*

[129] Some cards are missing, and it is quite probable that Nabokov had made more notes than the one's available today.

[130] Whitrow was a mathematician, cosmologist, and professor of history of science, who worked at the Imperial College in London. He had devoted his life to the phenomenon of time, and his research into extra-dimensional spaces led him to develop an alternative theory to relativity. Whitrow's *The Natural*

Philosophy of Time as a gift from Jane Howard, who learned, during a 1964 interview with him, that he had plans to write an essay on the subject (*AY* 487). Nabokov's praise of *The Natural Philosophy of Time* comes as something of a surprise. The volume is an overview from Plato to Relativity, a survey of such historical concepts as: universal and individual time, origin of time, relativity, causal theory, among others. Nabokov, an author averse to generalities, should not be so derivative of Whitrow. He, nevertheless, randomly collects arguments and examples from him, without attempting to form a unified theory. *Texture of Time*, at times, seems to follow the organization of Whitrow's chapters. Van devotes one paragraph for each thematic section: evolution of time, relativity, direction of time, motion, simultaneous events, as if the protagonist also wished to present an overview on the topic just like as the philosopher did. Furthermore, the terms 'individual time' and 'universal time,' which Nabokov capitalizes in the novel, are also the title of Whitrow's first and second chapter.

Marina Grishakova was the first to notice that Van takes the odd metaphor of time as a "hollow" from Henri Piéron, whom Nabokov discovered in Whitrow (76). For Piéron, "a hollow" is a figure of speech that illustrates our sense of the present: "five or six seconds [is] the limit of time during which a series of successive events can be retained, 'like water in the hollow of the hand'" (*NPT* 80). Van borrows this example, adding a capital letter and a bawdy meaning to it. In the treatise, the word appears in the context of Van's "rhythmic 'beats:" "that dim continuum [his memories] cannot be as sensually groped for, tasted, hearkened to, as Veen's Hollow between rhythmic beats" (431). In this passage, it is clear that rhythm and the hollowness (of his hands) regards Van's masturbation. Van can "sensually grope, taste and harken" the rhythm of his member in

Philosophy of Time (1961) was celebrated at the time of its publication, leading to his appointment as the first president of the International Society of the Study of Time in 1966.

the hollow of his hands. In case the reader has not caught this metaphor, Van calls attention to it over and over again: "A Hollow, did I say?" or "How can I extract [time] from its soft hollow?" (*Ada* 421). In *Lolita*, this same word has been applied as a reference to hand jobs: "she had painted lips and was holding in her hollowed hands a beautiful, banal, Eden-red apple" (60-61).

In *Ada*, tactile memories of Ada's skin are "preserved in the hollow of his hand" (100)—as opposed to in his fingertips—and Lucette's armpit, which Van ardently kisses, mimicking oral sex, is described as, "hot, humid and perilous hollow" (327). Van also admits that at the same time as he was writing his chronicle, he was thinking about Ada, "after so many hollows and heights of time" (157), aligning his self-pleasure again with handwriting and time's rhythm. The term 'hollow,' therefore, links the plot with the essay through this imagery of hands.

Just as with Whitrow, Nabokov also plundered the work of Samuel Alexander for quotes.[131] According to Duncan White, the same strategy of erotic recontextualization occurred as early as *Bend Sinister* (2017: 78-79). In that book, the protagonist Adam Krug, like Van Veen, a renowned philosopher, quotes a passage verbatim from Alexander without attribution: "[w]hen a body is sweet and white all over, the motions of whiteness and sweetness are repeated in various places and intermixed […]" (*BS* 148, Alexander 275). The passage is not only identical, but it is clearly borrowed for its erotic connotations: "sweetness" (*sladost*) was a synonym for orgasm already used by Nabokov in the context of *The Enchanter* (Shrayer 2000: 499). In *Ada*, it refers again to Van's "sweet fire that had been consuming him" since the beginning of his sexual childhood

[131] Samuel Alexander (1859-1938) was an Australian-born British philosopher, a precursor of the theory of Emergentism, according to which matter is derived from time and space. His major work, *Time, Space and Deity* (1920) is mentioned ten times in different sections of *Notes for Textures of Time.* In *Ada,* his theory that flies and man experience time differently is mocked thus: "[t]he same section of Space may seem more extensive to a fly than to S. Alexander, but a moment to him is not 'hours to a fly,' because if that were true, flies would know better than wait to get swapped" (Ada 425).

games (48).

In *Notes*, Nabokov is perhaps even more heavy-handed. When Alexander, for example, claims that "remembering is a kind of desire…directed backwards" (118), Nabokov fires back: "Alexander, that is sodomy not memory" (*NTT*, Past 22). On another index card, Nabokov comments upon Alexander's homosexuality, stressing the importance of the hands: "shaking hands with a male…is often the only erotic contact that shy, fearful and old-fashioned homosexuals in academic circles are able…to enjoy" (*NTT*, Reading Alexander). Although Nabokov never comments on the personal life of any of his other sources, his negative remarks about Alexander's sexual preferences seem to dictate his approach to the thinker, leading Nabokov to sum him up later as "a very coquettish philosopher" (*NTT*, Space 13). 'Coquettish' here implies that Alexander's thought was feminine and therefore inappropriate. This comment underscores again Nabokov's own anxiety regarding homosexuality and gender roles, which I have already commented upon in *Family Troub*les.[132]

As the novel progresses, Van gives the reader numerous examples of how he is an "impure" philosopher. In *Texture of Time*, he mentions the following definition of space: "'Space' (it says here [that is, in the *Encylopedia Britannica*], rather suggestively) 'denotes the property, you are my property, in virtue of which, you are my virtue, rigid bodies can occupy different positions' Nice? Nice." (443). While the passage reproduces the encyclopedia entry only to make a rather obvious joke about rigid penises and material things, it also characterizes the female body as a property of the senses, or as an object to be possessed. In another moment, Van and Ada poke fun at Emile Littré's French Dictionary, where lips are described as the two edges of a wound. "Wounds procreate," remarks Van, making a reference to the vagina, which is absent in Littré (83).

[132] See *Family Troubles* for a broader discussion on Nabokov and homosexuality.

Van does not only emphasizes hidden erotic connotations, like above, he also embellishes or modifies the original in detail. For example: in Whitrow, there is some disagreement about how long the duration of the present moment is supposed to last. William James (Henri James' brother) says that the Specious Present is a durationless moment but then concedes that it might last as long as a minute. For Henri Piéron, it lasts only 5 or 6 seconds (*NPT* 78-80). Van, however, argues that it cannot last more than three or four seconds. He gives the following reason: "The rhythm should not be neither too slow nor too fast. One beat per minute is already far beyond my sense of succession and five oscillations per second make a hopeless blur" (*Ada* 421). Rhythm here suggest sexual cadence not present in either author, but "one beat per minute" and "five oscillations" clearly refer to James' and Piéron's hypotheses, another instance in which Nabokov is in dialogue with a controversy whose origins he only vaguely alludes to.[133] In another moment in the novel, though, Van re-writes Whitrow's sentence to address this same issue:

> the *true* Present, which is an instant of zero duration, represented by a rich smudge, as the dimensionless point of geometry is by a sizable dot in printer's ink on palpable paper. (*Ada* 432)
>
> The 'true present' must be durationless, a moment of time sharply dividing past from future and utterly distinct from both. This "true present"…is a mathematical idealization like the dimensionless point of geometry. (*NPT* 78)

From the original to Van's philosophical prose, one can observe the following modifications: the addition of metaphors ("dot in a printer's ink" and "rich smudge"); the melodic contribution of the alliteration "palpable paper;" the use of capitalization and

[133] Van Veen seems quite obsessed with this theoretical minutia: "A patient of mine could make out the rhythm of flashes succeeding one another every three milliseconds" (0.003!) (*Ada* 421).

italics; and the paraphrase of "instant of zero duration" to "durationless."[134] From now on, I will call this procedure "Nabokov's borrowings," when there is a clear appropriation of sentences, but with minor alterations in order to enhance the poetic or the erotic features of the original. One can observe this procedure in other passages, like the following:

> The "passage of time" is merely a figment of the mind with no objective counterpart, but with easy spatial analogies. (*Ada* 427)
>
> [T]he *passage* of time … is to be regarded merely as a feature of consciousness with no objective counterpart. (*NPT* 227-228)

Here, instead of the italics, Nabokov uses quotation marks to highlight the expression "passage of time," changing "feature of consciousness" to the poetic "figment of the mind."

Nabokov is not always so closely derivative, though. At times, he dialogues with his sources, without marking the reference. A good example of this can be seen when Van wants to prove that evolution is not always a progressive movement. Van mentions a creature that "loses its teeth and becomes a bird, the best the latter can do when needing teeth again is to evolve a serrated beak, never the real dentition it once possessed. The scene is Eocene and the actors are fossils" (*Ada* 422). This example is thrown into *Texture of Time* and never mentioned again. The presentation of this biological fact in terms of a play, with a 'scene' of extinct animals, leads the reader to believe that Van is creating the fantastic scenario, but actually it is a reference to Dollo's Law, which appears in one of Whitrow's footnotes: "[o]ne of the best known examples is the pseudo-dentition of *Odontopteryx*, an eocene bird. Instead of regaining its lost teeth, its beak and lower jaw were serrated in saw-like form" (13). Nabokov clearly is borrowing specific passages,

[134] Marina Grishakova believes that Van's hollowness of time and the specious present are the keys to understand *Texture of Time*. According to her, Specious Present is important for Van because it regards the combination of past and present (76-77).

which are either identical or very similar to the original, without any form of reference.

Nabokov's manuscript makes the search for these hidden references easier, but the novel itself pushes the reader to seek out the sources. First of all, some names are given in a 'pseudo' scientific way, as when Van mentions "(Guyau in Whitrow)" or simply "S. Alexander" or "Minkowski" in a single paragraph of the treatise (425). *Texture of Time*'s 'odd' combinations of words, like "Eocene fossils," "accumulation of sensa," (427) or "indistinguishable inane (Locke) (425)" incentivizes the reader to search for the original context in which these expressions were originally used, in order to shed light on Van's cryptic text. Searching for these references, though, is almost pointless from an intellectual point of view, since Van's treatise is rather chaotic, randomly borrowing passages from these philosophical texts. However, after comparing the original sources with Nabokov's version, the reader is able to find an erotic assemblage of source-material connected by language and metaphors and not by intellectual affiliation.

Besides Whitrow, another of Nabokov's major sources is *Voices of Time: A Cooperative Survey of Man's View of Time as Expressed by the Sciences and by the Humanities* (1966). A compilation of 27 articles, edited by Julius Thomas Fraser, the book is organized as an introductory and interdisciplinary approach to time. Nabokov, in the manuscript, makes notes on seven authors he discovered in Fraser's volume: A. Cornelius Benjamin, Friedrich Kümmel, Joost A.M. Meerloo, John Cohen, Karl C. Hamner, Milič Čapek and Richard Schlegel.[135]

Judging from his choice to annotate these seven articles, Nabokov was particularly

[135] The titles of their articles are: A. Cornelius Benjamin, "Ideas of Time in the History of Philosophy"; Friedrich Kümmel, "Time as Succession and the Problem of Duration"; Joost A. M. Meerloo, "The Time Sense in Psychiatry"; John Cohen, "Subjective Time"; Karl C. Hamner, "Experimental Evidence for the Biological Clock"; Miliĉ Čapek, "Time in Relativity Theory: Arguments for a Philosophy of Becoming"; Richard Schlegel, "Time and Thermodynamics."

interested in a humanistic view of time's manifestation. Benjamin offers a survey of the concept of time from pre-Socratics to Alexander. Kümmel was clearly influenced by Bergson; he defends the view that time is lived experience, in which psychological factors should be taken into account (46-47). Meerloo, Cohen, and Hamner investigate the experience of subjective time and biological time, respectively. Čapek, himself influenced by Bergson and Whitehead, writing on the theory of relativity, contends that time-space is not static (as in block universe theory) but is also "becoming," like the self. Richard Schlegel analyzes the concept of entropy in the theory of relativity and in biological processes, observing that time has different directions in different spheres of analyses.

Nabokov did not borrow from *Voices of Time* as heavily as he did from Whitrow. Nevertheless, passages in it were important influences on passages of *Ada*. Van reflects, for example: "social thinkers, feel the Present as pointing beyond itself toward a not yet realized 'future'—but that is topical utopia, progressive politics" (*Ada* 440). "Thinkers" here refers to Čapek, who calls the awareness of time "the feeling of the present pointing beyond itself toward a not yet realized future" (452). Here, Nabokov also borrows and changes minor features of Čapek's sentence. He capitalizes nouns and adds inverted commas, but more importantly, he transforms the reference to the philosopher into a vague "social thinker." Van, therefore, is intentionally hiding his sources, establishing a somewhat chaotic net of implied references. What remains is an assemblage of ideas that cannot be easily untangled. No wonder that some scholars have completely avoided engagement with *Texture's* content, preferring to dismiss it as incoherent (Norman, 2012:1).

There are other borrowings and hidden references in *Texture of Time* (see appendix 3 for a complete list). Although I have not compared all 50 sources, my point is that Nabokov can be closely derivative from his sources. He modifies these original pre-

texts, in detail, in order to embellish or add sexual content to it. What becomes clear to me is that one should not return to Nabokov's source material to understand the true meaning of time, but to experience its texture, the "web of sense" (*PF* 63), which is established through imagery, vocabulary, sounds, and tactile experiences. As Adam Barrows claims, "we should "rather think in terms of reclaiming the conceptual value of "overlapping, disadjusted and irreconcilable aspects of time frames" (59) in *Ada*. In fact, Nabokov's approach to both time and to his sources demonstrate how *Texture of Time* is also a play, an erotic 'hide and seek' game that propels us to 'touch on' the archive.

3.4 Nabokov, the Pla(y)giarist

In *Despair* (1934) the unreliable protagonist-narrator, Hermann Karlovich, believes he has found his double, devising a profitable scheme. Karlovich wants to swap identities with this other man and then to kill him, in order to collect his own life insurance. About his arrangement, Hermann conjectures:

> What if I find it rather flattering that you should steal my property? Theft is the best compliment one can possibly pay a thing. And do you know the most amusing part? I assume that, having made up your mind to effect that pleasant robbery, you will suppress the compromising lines, the very lines I am writing now, and, moreover, fashion certain bits of your liking (which is less pleasant though) just as a motor-car thief repaints the car he has stolen. (61-62)

This passage is as intriguing as it is comical. On the one hand, at the level of the plot, this reasoning serves to justify Hermman's scam to rob his double's identity. As a metaliterary comment, however, it could be applied just as easily to Nabokov's parodist method of composition, especially his strategy of 'stealing' excerpts from his sources seen in the section above. The description of art as theft is positively embraced as an act of emulation,

an exercise of (re)modeling the original. The "suppression of compromising lines" is essential to his method. Certain bits of the original will be refashioned, as Nabokov so carefully did in changing the minutia of his pre-texts. One might say that the passage above argues that parody is not theft; or, maybe, that plagiarism can be an "elegant offense" (Horn 1). In *Despair*, Hermann playfully steps over the limits of the moral idea that one's identity and life are one's property; in *Ada*, Nabokov plays with the same limits in a purely aesthetic realm, equating homage (parody) with robbery (plagiarism). But what is the nature of Nabokov's borrowings in *Texture of Time*?

One needs to discuss the concept of parody and plagiarism to attempt to answers this question. In rhetorical, as well as in poetic tradition, parody has been frequently defined as "repetition with a difference" (Hutcheon 32). As a trans-historical phenomenon, though, the concept varies considerably, depending on the culture, target audience, or pragmatic application of the texts involved. Parody can be either general or specific, depending on whether it takes a genre or a single text as its target (Korkut 16-17).[136] It has been defined as homage, satire or game, depending on whether the *ethos* of the parodist stresses the critical function of art or the self-reflexive modernist notion of literature as game (Rose 45-47). For the Russian Formalist Iurii Tynyanov, parody is a dialectic technique that works as an evolutionary device to ameliorate or create something new (1975[1921]: 101). Parody, in short, can be a whole range of things and, in the analysis of concrete texts, the sheer variety of classifications can prove risky. Therefore, to define *Texture of Time*'s borrowings merely as parody might be problematic.

Since Bakhtin theorized dialogism, Kristeva theorized intertextuality, and

[136] Margaret A. Rose makes this distinction, using the terms "general" and "specific" parody. She understands as "general parody" works such *Don Quixote*, *Tristram Shandy* or *Ulysses*, in which parody has been used to create the structure and stories as a whole, while for her "specific parody" regards only passages of the text (47). According to the French literary theorist Gérard Genette, parody as a structure can be defined as the "minimal transformation of a text" (1982: 33). Genette, however, denies the existence of parody as a "genre."

postmodernism questioned romantic notions of authorial ownership, parody has come to be seen as immanent to the utterance itself. Observing these zones of unstable meaning, Raymond Federman, a disciple of Nabokov, invented the concept of pla(y)giarism, problematizing the limits between copying and intentional appropriation:

> You're born a playgiarizer or you are not. It's as simple as that. The laws of playgiarism are unwritten, it's a taboo, like incest, it cannot be legalized. The great playgiarizers of all time, Homer, Shakespeare, Rabelais, Diderot, Rimbaud, Proust, Beckett, and Federman have never pretended to do anything else than playgiarizing. Inferior writers deny that they playgiarize because they confuse plagiarism with playgiarism, not the same. The difference is enormous, but no one has ever been able to tell what it is. It cannot be measured in weight or size. Plagiarism is sad. It cries, it whines. It always apologizes. Playgiarism on the other hand laughs all the time. It makes fun of what it does while doing it. (418-419)

Nabokov was a born pla(y)giarizer. In *Russian Years*, the first half of his biography of the writer, Boyd relates that the ten-year-old Vladimir wrote a poem that his cousin "thought […] looked suspiciously good, and challenged him. Yuri was right: Vladimir's 'first poem' was plagiarized, and the two fought a mock duel to settle the matter" (96). Michael Maar, in *The Two Lolitas* (2005), points to the existence of a pre-Lolita, a short story written by a German, Heinz von Lichberg, in 1916. According to Maar, not only is the title of the story identical, but there are also thematic and structural coincidences. Both texts are about an older man and a younger girl; the protagonist rents a room at her house; she is a nymphet, i.e., simultaneously a child and a devil; she dies after childbirth and he, devastated by her death, becomes an author. Maar never calls the sum of these resemblances plagiarism. He discusses though the possibility of it being a case of

unconscious borrowing, cryptomnesia (57). Maar' theory, however, has been given little credit. Dieter Zimmer denies what he calls the "Lichberg Myth," saying that no proof of "influence" or "triggering" can be produced. According to Zimmer, Nabokov's *Lolita* does not derive from Lichberg since no smoking gun has been produced: there are no verbatim passages (2016).[137]

If no one has found plagiarism in *Lolita*, *ipsis litteris* passages have been detected in other of Nabokov's works, like *The Gift*.[138] Irina Paperno carefully analyzes the second and fourth chapters of the novel and, following her, others have also pointed to Nabokov's penchant for copying the passages of other writers (Ronen 2000, Dolinin 2000, Engel-Braunschmidt 2003, Zimmer and Hartmann 2002/2003). In *The Gift*, scholars have identified 16 sources and 106 references in Chapter Two, with no fewer than five sources and ten passages in Chapter Four (in particular, Nabokov seems to have been an avid reader of nineteenth-century travel diaries). Paperno compares Nabokov's borrowings to the "knight moves" described by Viktor Shklovskii, the Russian formalism, a technique that deforms the original in order to produce something new (296-300). At times, Paperno calls this procedure "aestheticization" saying that Nabokov stylistically transmutes materials through the addition of colors, vocalization, names or inversion of syntax, etc. (311). On yet another occasion, Paperno claims that this technique resembles the cinematographic collage (300). Zimmer and Sabine Hartmann believe that Paperno's

[137] In *Zina's Paradox* (2000), Stephen Blackwell expounds upon Nabokov's likeness to Iulii Aikhenvald (31-36). In several points of *Strong Opinions*, *Lecture on Literature,* and *The Gift*, Nabokov also echoes Aikhenvald, using the same poignant combination of words. Although Blackwell does not discuss parody or plagiarism, he emphasizes the presence of these striking similarities.

[138] One example of Hartmann and Zimmer's finding in *The Gift*: "In the evenings the harmonious, melodic sounds of swan flights reverberated through the silence; the yellow of the rushes distinctly brought out the lusterless white of birds. Kozlov's original: "In the evenings, the harmonious, melodic sounds of swan flights reverberated through the complete silence all about. Against the background of the yellow rushes, the lustreless white of the birds showed especially clear." (64). The resemblance between the passages is striking, and its derivative aspect unquestionable. Nevertheless, Nabokov scrupulously reworks his precursors in the minutiae of the text. He eliminates a few elements "complete," "all about," "against the background of"; dislocates "the yellow rushes;" and finally, he suppresses punctuation.

collage theory "does not do justice to what Nabokov did with the material" (35). Their counterargument is that:

> [Nabokov] thoroughly studied the literature available to him, carefully lifted from it the kind of facts he wanted (sometimes just one or two from a book of several hundred pages), homogenizing, blending, paraphrasing, embellishing, condensing, summarizing, expanding, and intensifying the material until it became an artefact of his own: art based in fact. (ibid.)

Zimmer and Hartmann seem preoccupied with underscoring Nabokov's diligence in appropriating the material of others, which Paperno also observes, perhaps in order to avoid a potentially embarrassing discussion of plagiarism. Be that as it may, while exposing Nabokov's appropriations, these scholars slightly change the approach to his works. It becomes clear by their comparisons that Nabokov's art is not uniquely a reflection of reality, a distorted image of the world in Russian formalist terms, but is in fact a hybrid in which aesthetic reformulations and direct referential elements are combined. It is a delicate shift of balance and metaphor from 'mirror' and 'copy with a difference,' to 'incorporation' and 'blend.' As McHale explains: "[u]fortunately, imitation and mirroring is not the only possible relation between the fictional world and reality….[things] are not only reflected in fiction so much as incorporated" (2004: 28). What is striking, though, is the lengths that Paperno, Zimmer, and Hartmann go to avoid an important debate on the gratuitousness and resemblance of Nabokov's passages, which would make their argument of blending even more striking.

In *Texture of Time*, Nabokov returns to his sources in similar terms. The borrowings or transmutations presented in the above section (and in Appendix 3) cannot be considered simple plagiarism, as Nabokov alters the original, even as he plants enough clues for the diligent reader (acquainted with his sources) to observe the similarities

between the passages.[139] Nabokov's intent is not to steal, conceal, or destroy his sources as the traditional concept of plagiarism implies (Rose 69); instead, it is to appropriate and modify them in a systematic fashion, like a pla(y)giarist.

When Nabokov secretly borrows minimal excerpts and alters them in the minutiae, he demonstrates that art not only imitates 'reality' but also appropriates it.[140] This method, though, should not be interpreted in Stephan Blackwell's metaphysical terms. According to Blackwell, the relationship between science and art in Nabokov is a spiral or circle that hints "at metaphysics and as a kind of ludic gesture, the means by which the author implies that the artifact transcends its mundane limits" (2003: 260), implying that the artistic reconstruction of a scientific idea liberates it from its mundane aspect. This view implies that nature or science is in need of an author to transform it into the sublime, returning to the romantic and modernist narrative of the author as a hero. Nabokov's borrowings, I argue, does not aim at the sublime neither to a mere aesthetization of the original, but it aims at an ironic and erotic play with his readers generated, in part, by the very bawdy friction between texts.

The tactics by which Nabokov plays with his sources—veiled, in the minutiae, and with sexual content—promote an erotic relationship between model and copy. In fact, one might say that Nabokov's borrowings are erotic in both *content* and *ethos*. First, because he searches for bawdy innuendos in his scientific sources, or adds erotic meaning to them. Secondly, because his intention is clearly to mingle with the original; it is a desire to intertwine with others, or at least with their language; finally, because he applies an

[139] Some parody, however, maintains the original with a minimal change of context, also known as minimal parody or trans-contextualization, resembling 'quotation,' however, with a difference of context and intention. For more, see Daniela Carpi, "Hermes: God of Thieves. Plagiarism in Twentieth Century Literature" (2003); Mirjam Horn, *Postmodern Plagiarism: Cultural Agenda and Aesthetic Strategies of Appropriation in US-American Literature (1970 -2010)* (2012).

[140] In the same vein, Peka Tammi observes that "[i]n a quite literal sense of the term, [Kinbote's] act of editing [Shade's] text exemplifies 'thievery,' for he has confiscated the dead poet's manuscript (206).

erotic *method*, which changes, in secret, only the details of the source texts through careful analyses.[141] Nabokov's pla(y)giarism, therefore, can there be better understood in the light of Heide Ziegler's sexual concept of parody. She claims that "contemporary American parody should not be perceived as presenting a polemical approach to the literary model (or models) […] but rather as entering into a seemingly erotic relationship with the prior text" (59). This does not mean, however, that all forms of intertextuality are sexual, neither that all of Nabokov's relationship with his forebears are sexually tinged, but that in the context of *Texture of Time* he has intentionally given such tone to his transmutations.

Nabokov's literary borrowings do not merely aim to improve or contest the original, demonstrating Nabokov's abilities as a craftsman, but they also work as a historical compendium of how Nabokov has manipulated his sources.[142] When Nabokov selects very precise passages from his sources, he invites the reader to dig into the originals as if s/he were an archaeologist, to compare the two versions like a scientist. Nabokov's borrowings engrave the protean path of his research into the text itself. Put somewhat differently, *Texture of Time's* pla(y)giarism and hidden dialogues function as an erotic archive, mapping the *past* of the text on its present, a place where multiple sources and their historical tensions are almost literally embodied. *Texture of Time* is,

[141] Nabokov's appropriations could also be classified as "parodic mimicry," since the presence of the original source is not disclosed to the reader. Robert Chambers explains this type of parody, saying: "[p]arodic mimicry does not disappear just because most readers fail to perceive its source, and in such cases, the apparent loss of parodic content is merely an illusionist element awaiting discovery. The parodic connections to the parodied text(s) will come back to life if the latter is exhumed and examined" (107).

[142] A lot has been said about Nabokov-as-parodist. Focusing on his parody of genres and styles, Appel claims that parody "is the keyword in *Lolita*, and it provides the key to all Nabokov's work" (1967: 212). Omry Ronen addresses Nabokov's intertextuality, charting the differences between emulations, parodies and even anti-parodies in his work. According to Ronen: emulation means to "equal or excel a certain model by selective imitation that intensifies its virtues and gently corrects its shortcomings." Parody exaggerates the characteristic features, especially faults; and anti-parody occurs when one hates a book, but "still may derive artistic delight from imagining other and better ways of looking at things" (1998: 162-163).

therefore, also a *locus memoriae*, prefiguring in some respects the postmodern conception of literature as a proliferation of textual data. If such copying, however, cannot be entirely mistaken as pastiche à la Jameson, it has a lot in common with the idea that postmodernist artists are fond of "overstimulating assemblages" (1991: 18-19).[143]

Carolyn Dinshaw observes that Barthes has described Jules Michelet's bodily historicism in these same terms. Barthes defends Michelet's practice of history as a kind of erotic and loving relationship, in which "documents are produced by that warmth, 'a kind of residual memory [*une rémanance*] of past bodies'" (1999*:* 47). Citation (whether acknowledged or not) establishes textuality as theatricality, whereby living and desirable relationships are performed in the body of the text.[144] Like borrowing, citation forges bodily contacts with and within sheets of paper. Nabokov's copies fetishistically (and, for that matter, queerly) "introduce" the other "into" his own material, thus breaking the intelligibility, but not the discernibility of difference. Outside the diegetic level, this process also ensures that the "good reader" will repeat Nabokov's gestures, parodying in 'real life' Nabokov's own manual technique of research, comparing texts, passages, and thereby becoming the third point in an erotohistoriographic love triangle.

3.5 Henri Bergson: The Body of Time

Texture of Time has several sources, as I have pointed out above. In Chapter Five, though, the heroine asserts that Van's concept derives specifically from Bergson and Whitehead, in conjunction: "'Veen's Time' (as the concept was now termed in one breath, one breeze, with 'Bergson's Duration' or Whitehead's 'Bright Fringe')" (*Ada* 453). Van aligns

[143] According to Fredric Jameson, pastiche is a form of neutral parody, emptied from the preoccupation with history and memory, which undertakes "the random cannibalization of all the styles of the past" (1991: 18). Nabokov, however, is concerned with forming a historical archive.

[144] According to Dinshaw, "[s]uch touching is accomplished through the citation, in another, later life, by yet another body, of those peculiar "details," "preferences," "inflections" of his life" (1999: 48).

himself with the philosophical school that defended time as "lived experience" instead of a physical and mathematical entity, explaining his opposition to Einstein and other physicists, like Hermann Minkowski and Paul Langevin. Van openly expresses his disagreement with new physics, saying "[a]t this point, I suspect, I should say something about my attitude to 'Relativity.' It is not sympathetic. What many cosmogonists tend to accept as an objective truth is really the flaw inherent in mathematics which parades as truth" (426).

Following these clues, several scholars have traced the parallels between Nabokov and Bergson as a common defense of time as duration, saying that time in the novel is a form of consciousness.[145] Bozovic affirms, in this vein, that "[t]he notion of duration provides the clue to *Ada*'s content, style, and structure, for Van's memoir illustrates and applies Bergson's philosophy of time" (202). For Michael Glynn, though, "Nabokov's fundamental Bergsonian trace is in the fact that man has an innate predisposition toward a 'delusive' view of the world," which means that man has a tendency to "misperceive reality" (57). Leona Toker, the author of several articles on the subject, claims that both writers have similar aesthetic preferences; they focus on the creative, useless and incidental (1995: 371).[146]

I believe, however, that there might be other reasons for this approximation between *Ada*, Bergson, and Whitehead. Both philosophers have equally criticized the Cartesian mind-body dichotomy, claiming that the body is a complex system that

[145] For more on Nabokov and Bergson see Leona Toker, *Nabokov and Bergson on Duration and Reflexivity* (2002) and "Minds Meeting: Bergson, Joyce, Nabokov and the Aesthetics of the Subliminal" (2013); Tetyana Lyaskovets, "Approaching Nabokov with Bergson on Time: Why Spatializing Time?" (2013); and Laci Mattison, "Nabokov's Aesthetic Bergsonism: An Intuitive, Reperceptualized Time" (2013).

[146] Márta Pellérdi sees in Nabokov a direct influence from Henri Bergson (114), while John Burt Foster asserts that "the best indications [of intertextual evidence] take the form of veiled allusions or unattributed echoes" (1993: 83). According to Foster, it is only during the 1930s that Nabokov "starts to take an interest in portraying fictive philosophers who share key traits with Bergson" (ibid.). Stephen Blackwell says that Nabokov's metaphysical bent was preceded by the "physicist-*manqué* Henri Bergson" (184), which whom he would share an interest in *élan vital*

intermediates our relation with the world, frequently in terms of pleasure. For me, this is the key to understanding the *Texture of Time*—body and pleasure—not duration as consciousness, or time as an abstract phenomenon of the mind.

Whitehead criticizes Kant's distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal.[147] The 'reality,' for him, is neither an object nor a derivative of perception, but a process of articulated relations that takes place in and through the body (1978[1929]: 15):

> It is this withness that makes the body the starting point for our knowledge of the circumambient world. We find here our direct knowledge of *causal efficacy*. Hume and Descartes in their theory of direct perceptive knowledge dropped out this withness of the body; and thus confined perception to presentational immediacy. (81)

This corporeal "withness" here implies reciprocity between bodies, which was absent in Hume's and Descartes' detached understanding of the world. [148] Whitehead's philosophy, also known as process or organic theory, also criticizes the Western emphasis on logos that conceals the body in the split between rational and sensitive. He writes:

> Nothing is more astonishing in the history of philosophic thought than the naïve way in which our association with our human bodies is assumed…[The body] is in fact merely one among other natural objects. And yet, the unity of "body and

[147] Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1967) was a British mathematician, famous for his three-volume *Principia of Mathematica* (1910−1913), which he wrote with his former Trinity College student, Bertrand Russell. During his career, Whitehead changed his field of interest from mathematics to philosophy of science and metaphysics, having been invited to teach these disciplines at Harvard University in 1924. There he wrote *Process and Reality* (1929), a revision of his *Gifford Lectures* at Harvard, elaborating his process theory. For more on Whitehead, see Isabelle Stenger's *Thinking with Whitehead* (2011).

[148] In *The Concept of Nature*, Whitehead advocates against the bifurcation of nature. He writes that "[u]nless we produce the all-embracing relations, we are faced with a bifurcated nature; namely, warmth and redness on one side, and molecules, electrons and ether on the other side […] The perceived redness of the fire and the warmth are definitely related in time and in space to the molecules of the fire and the molecules of the body" (32-33).

> mind" is the obvious complex that constitute the one human being... [o]ur feeling of bodily-unity is a primary experience. It is an experience so habitual and so completely a matter of course that we rarely mention it. No one ever says, here am I, and I brought my body with me. In what does this intimacy of relationship consist? The body is the basis of our emotional and purposive experience. It determines the way we react to clear sensa. It determines the fact that we enjoy sensa. (1968[1938]: 114-115)

As one can observe, Whitehead not only focuses on the body, but he also understands existence as a pleasurable experience. According to Prigogine and Stengers, in Whitehead's ontology, "all *physical* existence [occurs] in terms of enjoyment, feeling, urge, appetite" (93-94). Whitehead even says, "life is the enjoyment of emotion, derived from the past and aimed at the future. It is the enjoyment of emotion which was then, which is now, and which will be then" (1968[1938]: 167). Nabokov borrows from Whitehead the expression "fringe of time" (38) and the title of the treatise, *Texture of Time* (28), which is an expression the philosopher uses to refer to time in relation to all other phenomena. Apparently, Whitehead's sensorial nomenclature seems to have pleased Nabokov.

After *Matter and Memory* (1896), Henri Bergson's philosophy also focuses on the body as a place in which time and matter meet. He was not only interested in consciousness, in metaphysical terms, but he also has scrutinized experimental studies, paying more attention to physiological events instead of abstract theories of the mind (Guerlac 123). In this volume, Bergson says:

> I see plainly how external images influence the image that I call my body: they transmit movement to it. And I also see how this body influences external images: it gives back movement to them. My body is, then, in the aggregate of

> the material world, an image which acts like other images, receiving and giving back movement, with, perhaps, this difference only, that my body appears to choose, within certain limits, the manner in which it shall restore what it receives. (4-5)

This means that, for Bergson, the body influences other images of the world through choice. In lower forms, like amoebas, he explains, "the complete process of perception and of reaction can […] hardly be distinguished from a mechanical impulse followed by a necessary moment" (22). In higher forms, there is a delay between perception and response, which allows us to introduce affection and free will. In this interval, the body interferes actively in reality, selecting only the relevant information and eliminating all that is irrelevant. The image we finally attain from the world is a blend between the thing itself and the representation construed by the body and mind.[149] Confirming this view, Bergson says in the preface to *Creative Evolution* that "*theory of knowledge* and *theory of life* seem to be inseparable" (xiii). Elizabeth Grosz confirms this, saying that Bergson's philosophy poses a hybrid of idealism and materialism, in which the "subject is not a subject because of a particular consciousness, but rather because of a particular biological and bodily constitution" (2005: 119). In Bergson, therefore, the body comes to the front as an agent, a centre of action, in which a composite of perceptions and feelings meet the external (1947[1896] 2-6).

Nevertheless, Bergson became famous for his first thesis, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* (1889), where he exacerbates the Platonic dualism, claiming that memory and time are a form of "consciousness," which he calls *Pure Duration* or *Durée*:[150]

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[149] Also see Michael R. Kelly, *Bergson and Phenomenology* (2010).

[150] William James, one of Nabokov's sources calls it "stream of consciousness" (Gunter 158).

> Pure Duration is the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego let itself *live*, when it refrains from separating its present state from its former states. For this purpose it not need to be entirely absorbed in the passing sensation or idea; for then, on the contrary, it would no longer *endure*. Nor need it forget its former states: it is enough that, in recalling these states, it does not set them alongside its actual state as one point alongside another, but forms both the past and the present states into an organic whole, as happens when we recall the notes of a tune, melting, so to speak, into one another. (1957 [1889]: 100)

In this treatise, Bergson claims that states of consciousness and time are different from matter and space because they never cease to grow and move, which means that they cannot be quantified as objects—only regarded as intensities (qualities or magnitudes). He reviews here the application of space and spatial principles to the study of time, revoking Newton's absolute time and Euclidian geometry. The French thinker also criticizes the legacy of Aristotle in Kant and in modern science, claiming that the great mistake was to take time as a "homogeneous receptacle" (1957[1889]: 232), i.e., time has been understood as an empty and all-pervading current filled up with events, which can be mechanically divided into independent items. This inaccurate train of thought, says Bergson, leads to an improper representation of time as an infinite straight line, in which events are punctually localized.[151]

Nabokov has been associated mainly with this early version of Bergson and the theory of duration as consciousness because of Nabokov's wish for transcendence. His desire to overcome linearity and history, as I explained in the *Introduction*, led to the idea

[151] Bergson counters false and real movement, saying that false movement is composed of the juxtaposition of static elements in space, one after the other, while real movement reveals the unceasing nature of things. This differentiation defines Bergson's and Einstein's understandings of cinematographic techniques and time's simultaneity (1957[1889]: 49).

that consciousness would be way of accessing this otherworld. In *Texture of Time*, Van indeed confirms his affiliation to *Time and Free Will*, saying that he is interested in "[p]ure Time, Perceptual Time, Tangible Time, Time free of content, context and running commentary…All the rest is numerical symbol or some aspect of Space" (*Ada* 422). Here, Van reiterates Bergson's separation of time and space, and he repeats Bergson words along the treatise several times. I am arguing, however, that unlike Van, Nabokov's main source for *Ada* is not *Time and Free Will*, but *Matter and Memory*. In *Notes for Texture of Time,* Nabokov remarks on his interest in the latter, which is the first book in is his "to get list" of sources.[152] Ada Barrows also observes this difference, saying that

> Nabokov gives us a burlesque parody of the Bergsonian consciousness wrapped up with the irresolvable aporias…[while] his novel *Ada* seems much more preoccupied with spatializing time onto the sensual particularity of the physical body. (96)

This means that Van and Nabokov have contradictory views of time: the character wants to prove that time is consciousness as a form of duration, while Nabokov demonstrates that time is a lived, multiple, and bodily phenomenon.

In the context of Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, the emphasis on "embodied memories" has also been considered a response to Bergson's duration. According to Georges Poulet, "If Bergson denounces and rejects the metamorphosis of time into space, Proust not only accommodates himself to it, but installs himself in it, carries it to extremes, and makes of it finally one of the principles of his art" (4). Hägglund also claims that "duration of the past is not spiritual and immaterial but depends on the inscription of time in a material body" (2011: 51).[153]

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[152] Marina Grishakova presents Nabokov's "to get list" of books for Notes on *Texture of Time* (78).

[153] Since the publication of Gilles Deleuze's *Bergsonism* (1991[1988]), a systematic re-evaluation of space in Bergson's theory has taken place, leading to a series of recent articles, in which Bergsonian's space regains its mobility. Scholars propose that the "inside" of matter (not very different from quantum

Nabokov so invested in reformulating Bergson's theory because, in doing so, he is not just responding to Bergson himself, but to Proust, Joyce, and the modernist tradition in general. [154] Furthermore, according to Elizabeth Grosz, Bergson is particularly interesting to authors who attempt to overcome mainstream Western thought. Because his philosophy departs from Platonic logic, Euclidian geometry, and Newtonian physics, Bergson is frequently associated with the "other" of feminine thinking (2005: 129). She claims that Bergson's vitalism is somewhat "wayward," and, for this reason, other authors, like Deleuze's reading of Bergson, "self-consciously aims at bringing out the monstrous and the grotesque" (ibid.) in his texts, pointing to an erotic and bodily relation between the two philosophers. In a letter to Michel Cressole, Deleuze refers to this as an "anal" mode of reading:

> My way of getting out of [the philosophical tradition] at that time was, I really think, to conceive of the history of philosophy as a kind of buggery or, what comes to the same thing, immaculate conception. I imagined myself getting onto the back of the author, and giving him a child, which would be his and which would at the same time be a monster. It is very important that it should be his child, because the author actually had to say everything that I made him say. But it also had to be a monster because it was necessary to go through all kinds of

perspectives) holds its real movement, corresponding, therefore, to consciousness, in the sense that both are continually moving. In opposition to "bad space" (external, isolated and quantified) there is a mobile reality in constant change (Addyman 30). In Nabokov Studies there is also a return to the concept of space. Will Norman sees in Nabokov and Walter Benjamin a late attempt "at constructing a spatialized temporal model, by which history can be disarmed and assimilated into personal experience" (2012: 55). In the same vein, Laci Mattison's claims that in *Speak, Memory*, Nabokov aestheticizes Bergson's concepts into a new formulation of "space" as "temporal layering" (38). Yvette Louria, in her analysis of Nabokov's resemblance to Proust, observes that both seem to be more interested in "the imaginative connection" between time and space than the real, external feature of time (475). For a more in-depth analysis of space in Bergson's work, also see Suzanne Guerlac, *Thinking in Time: An Introduction to Henri Bergson* (2006).

[154] As Fredric Jameson states concerning postmodern literature, "if temporality still has its place, it would seem better to speak of the writing of it…[t]he writing of time, its enregisterment" (1991: 153), which means that time is spatialized in postmodernist tradition as well.

> decenterings, slips, break-ins, secret emissions, which I really enjoyed. My book on Bergson seems to me a classic case of this. (qtd. in Grozs 226)

Apparently, Bergson's philosophy, while defending interpenetrating states of being has also projected unique ways of handling his works.[155] In this passage above, Deleuze provides a queer version of Harold Bloom's anxiety of influence. Deleuze's narrative of historical development is not based on the struggle between men, but on intentional distortion, with a definite hint of homosexual desire, not merely homosocial impulse. In *Ada*, Nabokov establishes his intercourse with Bergson in similar terms. He intentionally manipulates Bergson to produce something else, which is monstrous in how it warps his texts but nevertheless remains devoted to them.

Van mimics the French philosopher stylistically to detach time from space, from the clock, and from universal time. Bergson's words are repeated in the text with filial devotion and specific terminologies like "intensities," "accumulation of sense," or "duration" are borrowed outright. "Time remains between thinker and thumb, when Monsieur Bergson uses his scissors" (*Ada* 425), Van says, pointing to the hands as the means by which one manipulates textual concepts. This repetition, however, is followed by a rough break. The "monstrous" aspect of *Texture of Time*, in Deleuze's meaning of the word, can be found precisely in the way Van disrupts Bergson's major philosophical idea: Van says that time is motionless, while Bergson defends that time is motion.

Another "monstrous" aspect of this impersonation can be seen in the way Van alters the Bergsonian concept of time as rhythm.[156] Whereas Bergson explains durations

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[155] Bergson's philosophy poses a hybrid of idealism and materialism, in which the "subject is not a subject because of a particular consciousness, but rather because of a particular biological and bodily constitution" (Grosz 2005: 119). One might conclude that in Bergson the body comes to the front as an agent, a center of action, in which a composite of perceptions and feelings meet the external (1911: 2-6).

[156] I believe Nabokov borrows the idea of time as rhythm from Bergson. Marina Grishakova, however, attributes Nabokov's usage to Whitrow and Fraisse (79), two of his secondary sources for *Texture of Time*.

as the striking of a bell (1957[1889]: 86)—an image Proust later introduced in *In the Search of Lost Time*—Van Veen hypothesizes that time is the lapse between the tolling, intentionally deforming Bergson's idea. Nabokov writes:

> Van's greatest discovery is his perception of Time as the dim hollow between two rhythmic beats, the narrow and bottomless silence *between* the beats, not the beats themselves, which only embar time. In this sense, human life is not a pulsating heart but the missed heartbeat. (*SO* 186)

The words "hollow" and "beats," as mentioned before, are sexual double entendres that refer to the countless scenes of Van masturbating. Pulsation, followed by a tight and bottomless rhythm, also evokes the operations of an organ other than the heart.

Van's relationship to Bergson's ideas may thus be devotional but are also perverse, in both senses of the word. Nabokov's own position relative to his character and his source can be evaluated in similar terms. Although via Van, Nabokov writes a "burlesque parody of Bergsonian consciousness" (Barrow 96), his intent is somewhat different from that of his creation. The triadic relationship between Bergson, Van, and Nabokov provides "tickles of approximation" (*Ada* 421), but never a full identification. Van repeats Bergson but usurps his idea of time as motion; Nabokov, on the other hand, pays homage to Bergsonian duration but rejects Bergson's and Veen's rejection of space, exploring instead time's materialization via the body. Nabokov, just like Deleuze, seems to be searching for an alternative history of development filled with pleasurable warps and slips.

4.0 Conclusion

In my introduction, I stated that Nabokov decided to "stay with the trouble" in his plots and personal relations—a maxim commonly associated with queer and feminist studies since Judith Butler defended the necessity of focusing on the complex aspects of gender, sex, and sexuality (1990). Although Nabokov demonstrates a conservative view of gender, which problematizes any approximation with queer and gender theory, his interest in taboo desires, his broken family relationships, and his search for the bodily pleasure outside idealism make his *oeuvre* particularly relevant for discussions concerning the non-normative. In a famous interview with Nicolas Garnham, he confirms this interest in the 'abnormal,' saying:

> [Y]ou are right in suggesting that the reality faked by a mediocre performer is boring, and that imaginary worlds acquire by contrast a dreamy and unreal aspect. Paradoxically, the only real, authentic worlds are, of course, those that seem unusual. When my fancies have been sufficiently imitated, they, too, will enter the common domain of average reality, which will be false, too, but within a new context which we cannot yet guess. Average reality begins to rot and sink as soon as the act of individual creation ceases to animate a subjectively perceived texture. (*SO* 118)

In this passage, Nabokov expresses his view that good writers are able to create new worlds beyond the worn-out conventions, and this authentic world, he continues, is paradoxically unreal, unusual, and dreamy. In saying this, Nabokov confirms the concept of *ostranye* in Russian formalist terms, but he also emphasizes that true art, for him, deals with the "aberrant individual of the species" (*SO* 155).

Although the majority of Nabokov's novels seem to be set in rather common universes, usually depicting the life of *émigré* man, these worlds are always inhabited

by people with odd obsessions and fantasies. Since the beginning of Nabokov's career, many critics have pointed out the outlandish atmosphere that underscores all of his novels although it was not always made clear what the sources of these critics' feelings of disconcertion were. In Part 01, I mentioned how Paul Sartre noticed masochist tendencies in Nabokov's relationship with Dostoevsky (1982[1939]: 66). Edmund Wilson also saw clear examples of *Schadenfreude* in Nabokov's work, either regarding his plots or his intended readers (AY 493). Rorty's famous interpretation of Nabokov's cruelty points to his "genius-monster" and his exercise of control (161), and Eric Naiman observes his "hermophobic" relationship with his readers (2010: 126).

At this point, one could say that Nabokov's *oeuvre* intertwines at least two universes. One of these is traditional and patriarchal. This is a world in which he defends his authority, his baroque net of reference – which I identify as being a masculine tendency to establish his fatherly figures inside of his own texts – and his desire to educate the reader. There is, however, another ambiguous universe that emerges from his novels that is marked by unconventional sexual tendencies and pleasures. The scholars commenting on his work can also be broadly divided into the specialists that read his *oeuvre* along these first lines, suggesting that Nabokov is the master of his domain; and the others that search for "sites of contestation" (Butler 1993: 228) and who try to unveil his other ambiguous universes. Michael Wood says that there might be, in fact, several "Nabokovs:" the historical person, who is inaccessible to us as readers and critics; the mandarin or arrogant author that makes demeaning comments; the signature or style that emerges from his texts (1994: 22). Within the various figures featured in Nabokov's writings, the reader must negotiate meanings in rather radical ways instead of accepting just one of the author's facets.

In this thesis, my goal was to uncover some of these other, more ambiguous, universes through an analysis of Nabokov's approach to time. I avoided, therefore, the lengthy discussion of transcendence, which, I believe, is part of the scholarly tendency to evaluate him as an author above historical contingency. On the contrary, my wish was to discuss Nabokov's concepts of time from a more worldly perspective, observing how the temporalities projected in his novels are *gendered*, *bodily,* and *historical* constructions. I made use, therefore, of the theoretical tools developed by critics from the field of queer temporalities, specifically, Carolyn Dinshaw (1999), Carla Frecerro (2005), and Elizabeth Freeman (2010), since these scholars share a common interest in understanding how the concept of time is an epistemological and biological construction that is forged through sexuality, discourses, and power relations. As I explained in *Queer Temporalities: Introducing Sexuality into the Study of Time*, the scholars from the field of queer temporalities subscribe to the assumption that the conventional notions of teleological time, progress, and genealogy are ingrained in the capitalist and heterosexual model of reproduction. They search for alternative formats of time and historical methods – which consider affect, touch, and bodily encounters – that break the notion of continuous and homogeneous time (Dinshaw 1999:51; Freeman 2010:93). I have been especially inspired by Freeman's and Dinshaw's analyses because they reinstate the body and physical pleasures as valid methods of historical and literary analysis. Freeman's theory is particularly important for my exam of *Ada*'s postmodern temporalities because she establishes a parallel between postmodernism and sexual dissidence. According to her, both categories (postmodernism and homosexuality) were forged simultaneously at the turn of the twentieth century and were understood as evasions from historicity into a sort of erotic and cubist multiplicity of time's manifestations. In saying this, Freeman provides a new interpretation of the

postmodernist canon that, different from the neo-Marxist accounts, such as those by Harvey (1989), Soya (1989), and Jameson (1991), takes eroticism and sexuality into account.

While compiling this study, it became clear that Nabokov's approach to time is *historical* and *gendered*. In *Speak, Memory*, human time is compared to a 'female temporalities' and circular timelessness. However, in *Ada, or Ardor* it is better understood as a postmodern cubist multiplicity of temporalities, according to Freeman's theory. I also argued that Nabokov's late exploration of time in *Ada* occurs via e*rotic rhetoric* and an *erotic method* of citation in which Nabokov explores time, history, and space through *bodily* contacts and eroticism.

In the course of writing this thesis, it also became clear to me that Nabokov's approach to time foregrounds his anxiety regarding the categories of feminine and masculine, more specifically, a fear to be aligned with female characteristics. I observed first that Nabokov criticizes patriarchy, in literary history, as long as he occupies a submissive position in relation to his predecessor. He, paradoxically, takes on a fatherly position as a way of redoubling his masculinity amid other great male authors, enjoying an allure of queerness with the authors he likes but eschewing any connection with the ones he does not like in an elective system of literary history. In other words, Nabokov enjoys a homosocial desire (Sedgwick 1985: 2) to 'touch' other authors, which, at times, calls into question his overtly masculine figure. Simultaneously he tries to regain his masculinity by dramatically avoiding any characteristic conventionally associated with women (submissiveness, dependency, and sentimentality), which leaves a misogynistic trace in his works. In this convoluted dynamic between homosociality and misogyny, Nabokov continuously shapes his literary relations as a power struggle: a

female (or child), on the one side, and a dominant male, on the other, always placing himself on the stronger side of this dichotomy.

Despite Nabokov's attempt to reinforce his masculinity—his intellect, his male literary family, and his dominance—a desire to be associated with 'female temporalities' emerges in works. In *Speak, Memory,* Nabokov's famous search for timelessness, I argued, underscore a clear wish for "motherly time" − an ideal of timelessness that he borrows from the nineteenth-century cult of intimacy. Hidden in his autobiography is a 'fantasy of the womb,' as an ideal place that Nabokov wishes to regain, marking his dependency on the female order. Nabokov tries to rebuild maternal security—a love in warm and humid spots—where he feels secure and protected, either inside the house or amid nature, also reconstructing these feelings in his writings. Nabokov also describes timelessness as a "cosmic synchronization" or "a sense of oneness with the sun and stone" (103), suggesting, in a sense, that he is 'in the uterus' with animals and humans. Such idealistic notions of motherly protection, I argue, are only shattered when Nabokov faces his first love for Tamara, his first experience of writing, and his life in exile—all moments in which Nabokov describes a feeling of being outside of the laws of nature. I observe the formation of a complex trope here, comprising, on the one hand, the ideal of femininity, nature, and writing; and exile, sexuality, and writing, on the other hand. Nabokov thus constantly projects the female body onto the landscape, trying to regain control over the object of his love either through nature or through his writing.

In *Ada, or Ardor*, instead of seeing a desire to reinstate timelessness as the motherly love, I observe what Freeman calls cubists postmodern timelessness. Nabokov finally decides to master other forms of 'writing time,' adding more temporal layers, plays, and also entangling an exploration of time as a 'lived' and sexual experience. In

Part 02, *Sensually Experiencing Time*, I have demonstrated how Nabokov intentionally clashes ontological and epistemological views of time, transforming time into a conundrum. Time not only changes in accordance with the narrative styles and epochs, but it also moves in a way dictated by the sexual excitement of the characters. It accelerates and decelerates following the logic of narrative climax as a parallel to sexual climax. Time is also rewound and moved forward like in an experimental movie. The bodies of the female characters are transformed into images on a screen, meaning Van Veen can relive, stop, and replay scenes from his memories. Owing to his anxiety concerning the future, the narrator also embeds other stories into the plot to avoid linear progress. The temporalities of the characters even change from one means of transportation to another in order to accommodate the tensions of the scene (Boyd 185: 22). Cinema also works as a surrogate for the body, presenting a manipulation of time as an erotic picture.

These technological devices are not just playful elements of the plot; they are directly related to the experience of time, its measurement and feelings, including sexual ones. Of course, Nabokov still contests the frivolity of the cinema, the shallowness of mainstream culture, and the lack of quality of some movies and directors, probably as a form of self-commentary after his experience writing the screenplay of *Lolita*. Nevertheless, the use of technology is so highly prominent—in how it counterpoints or reinforces the narrative time and bodily encounters—that its presence cannot be neglected. Even the general structure of the novel follows such radical movements. It borrows new concepts, discussed in the field of new physics, concerning the ideas of layering, rewinding, embedding, and forking-paths in the general organization of the plot. In this sense, *Ada* is a compendium of Nabokov's technologies of time, both fictional and real, which provides the key to understanding

the presence of these same devices in his other texts. As I commented before, in his first novel *Mary*, the presence of photography and trains, which were the means by which Ganin could relive his memories, play a fundamental role in his experience of time. In *Speak, Memory*, Nabokov organizes his memories in a similar way to home movies, painting, and slides, which provides him with new ways to access his past. Ultimately, I am arguing that there is a necessity to review and expand the discussion of technology in Nabokov's work, observing how he explores such devices as surrogates for the body.

Besides this exploration of time's multiplicity, I also observed how, in *Ada*, Nabokov reintroduces the body as a means of accessing time through embodied memories. In my examination of *Texture of Time*, the treatise embedded in the novel, I applied Elizabeth Freeman's notion of erotohistoriography to Van's essay. *Texture of Time* demonstrates that Van was haunted by his past (Ada's hair, skin, and kisses) and that these memories are not only intellectual or subjective but also a complex system in which eroticism and touch bring forth new historical content. Outside the traditional model of historiography, which is based on detached sight and objective analyses, erotohistoriography replaces the body and its pleasure as a fundamental tool of the historian (Freeman 2010: 96). This emphasis on affect, pleasure, and texture is transposed into Van's philosophical treatise and enacted in his writing and reading process. In other words, he transforms time itself into a body that's ready to be caressed as in a sexual encounter. In his failed attempt to grasp time's meaning, his essay becomes a playful game that is suggestive of a sadomasochist practice, specifically sploshing, inviting the reader to caress the fetishizing assemblage of temporal textures.

In the last part of the dissertation, *Thinking Erotically about Time*, I analyze Nabokov's unconventional practices of intertextuality through a detailed examination of *Notes for Texture of Time*, a manuscript of the Berg Collection in the New York

Public Library. I had already explained how Nabokov points to a slightly homoerotic relationship with his fatherly predecessors—at once, he fetishizes patriarchy and yet seems to enjoy embodying a hint of queerness. Analyzing the sources of *Texture of Time*, it becomes evident to me that Nabokov, simultaneously, tries to emphasize his fatherly lineage and demonstrates a hidden and queer desire for bodily contact, which is manifested through the insertions of sexual content into the presentation of scientific theories. He transforms a 'serious' discussion of time's meaning into a game; the reader is propelled to find the scientific references and yet s/he cannot form a coherent theory from them. Comparing Nabokov's sources and his novel, it also became clear how *Texture of Time* involves an erotic form of parody; he is playfully borrowing some of his predecessors and yet changing the original details and adding sexual connotations to them. Finally, I examined, in *Henry Bergson: The Body of Time*, how Nabokov aligns Van Veen with Bergson and Whitehead in order to highlight how time is also an experience that takes form through the body instead of being merely a phenomenon of consciousness. Many scholars have interpreted Nabokov in the light of Bergson's early work *Time and Free Will* (1889), claiming that, like in "duration," time would be a form of consciousness. Nabokov has himself played with such an idea by associating time and consciousness in his writings. I explain, on the other hand, that *Ada, or Ardor* borrows from *Matter and Memory*, a preoccupation with the body and its complex apparatus—this includes a study of how affect and 'lived body' are indispensable to our understanding of the relation between time and matter. Following the model of Deleuze's reading of Bergson, I claim that Nabokov's works require a rather sexual form of reading and that he manipulates Bergson's concepts in order to produce something different that is devoted to the philosopher and yet monstrous in how he manipulates his original work.

This thesis, I hope, might encourage other analyzes of time and sexuality in Nabokov's *oeuvre*, and also new interpretations of his use of technologies in light of his fascination with eroticism. Another aspect that deserves more attention is the recurrent presence of sadomasochism in his works, a topic that, surprisingly, has never been thoroughly analyzed within the field of Nabokov's poetics.[157] I believe that sadomasochism is not only a metaphor for his power relations with his readers and other authors—a mark of Nabokov's attempt to 'educate' and dominate – but, in fact, also a playful game in which pleasure and pain occur together as the result of close physical contact. Sadomasochism has gone through some theoretical reviews in feminist and queer studies, at least since the 1950s, which try to depathologize this practice via ethnographic studies of real experiences of consensual SM instead of focusing on the social constructions that stigmatize this form of sexuality as unhealthy or abnormal (Beckman 1). Nabokov's works, I believe, could also profit from this less institutionalized interpretation.

Frequently condemned by the second wave feminists and race theorist because of the political implications concerning the association between SM and the Holocaust, slavery and the perpetuation of power discrepancies, more recently, this sexual practice is looked in a different light by theorists such as Lynda Hart (1998) and Ann Cvetkovich (2003). They argue that sadomasochism bears a healing effect as a way of dealing with past traumas. Freeman explains that sadomasochism "works as a way to re-enact a past sexual trauma for the purpose of organizing it as an experience" (2010: 142). In other words, in sadomasochist scenes, at least one player gets to articulate a future regarding the changes that will take place as s/he (re)encounters violent actions (that are possibly

[157] Krin Gabbard (1994); Ilsa J. Bick (1994), and Maurice Couturier (2014) have already provided some insightful readings on Nabokov's use of sadomasochism. I am arguing, though, that sadomasochism deserves an in-depth and more systematic inquiry.

similar to those encountered more organically in the past) (ibid.). This means that sadomasochism is not an equivalent to the oppressive forces it mimics, and neither is it a dematerialized symbolic metaphor of sexual psychic structures; it is a means by which one can revisit the past, transforming it into new possibilities.

From this perspective, regarding Nabokov's erotic approach to time, sadomasochism can be interpreted as the author's way of rearticulating his rather traumatic experience with time: for example, his forced emigration and the loss he suffered at a young age. In the context of *King, Queen, Knave*, sadomasochism indeed seems to be presented as an act of power over a non-consensual subject and is seen in the characters' desires to subordinate another. Martha dominates Franz clearly as a way of regaining her strength. In the context of *Texture of Time*, though, sadomasochism plays a much more complex, erotic and playful role. Van's sadomasochist desire to 'grasp' time is not so much a wish to arrest the body of the heroine but a sign of his inability to understand time, and this leads to a kind of erotic play resulting from his multiple encounters with time and its surfaces. No wonder that time is ascribed a physical body in this treatise through the fetishizing assemblage of textures, styles, references, and clothes. Time, in this novel, is presented in many tactile and sensible experiences, meaning that sadomasochism clearly comes across as an invitation for the reader to 'splosh' with the text.

Sadomasochism, therefore, serves to bring the reader's attention back to his/her bodily experiences in reading; more than that, though, the prominence of this sexual practice in the text points to Nabokov's attempts to transform the past from an untouchable, inaccessible, transcendental idyll into a present and rearticulated concept with which he can interact. Maybe, in Nabokov's more mature relationship with his past, he has abdicated an idealized notion of time and committed to a pleasurable and

painful acceptance of its existence. One might say that he accepts the inability to reverse time, or the inability even to comprehend time, and embraces its bodily and subjective possibilities. In this sense, sadomasochism might be a metaphor for Nabokov's later relationship to time: a relationship that is marked by play, by multiple bodily encounters, by the phantasmagoric presence of the past, and by the transformation of time into an erotic, textual, and tangible entity.

5.0 Appendix

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5.3 Nabokov's Borrowings, Paraphrases, and Dialogues

1)

How can I extract it from its soft hollow? The rhythm should be neither too slow nor too fast. One beat per minute is already far beyond my sense of succession and five oscillations per second make a hopeless blur. The ample rhythm causes Time to dissolve, the rapid one crowds it out. Give me, say, three seconds, then I can do both: perceive the rhythm and probe the interval. A hollow, did I say? (*Ada* 421)

James maintained that in its widest sense, the mental (or specious) present can last as long as a minute, but Piéron places at about five or six seconds the limit of time during which a series of successive events can be retained, 'like water in the hollow of the hand', in an act of unified comprehension. (Whitrow 80)

2)

the *true* Present, which is an instant of zero duration, represented by a rich smudge, as the dimentionless point of geometry is by a sizable dot in printer's ink on palpable paper. (*Ada* 432)

[…] the 'true present' must be durationless, a moment of time sharply dividing past from future and utterly distinct from both. This 'true present' […] is a mathematical idealization like the dimentionless point of geometry. (Whitrow 78)

3)

We are told that if a creature loses its teeth and becomes a bird, the best the latter can do when needing teeth again is to evolve a serrated beak, never the real dentition it once possessed. The scene is Eocene and the actors are fossils. (*Ada* 422)

The idea of the irreversibility of organic evolution has been called Dollo's law, after the Belgian palaeontologist* who drew attention to the evidence for it in the fossil record.

*One of the best known examples is the pseudo-dentition of *Odontopteryx*, an eocene bird. Instead of regaining its lost teeth, its beak and lower jaw were serrated in saw-like form. (Whitrow 13)

4)

The 'passage of time' is merely a figment of the mind with no objective counterpart, but with easy spatial analogies. (*Ada* 427)

the *passage* of time – which is the very essence of the concept – is to be regarded merely as a feature of consciousness with no objective counterpart. (Whitrow 227- 228)

5)

(…) of course, at fifty years of age, one year seems to pass faster because it is a smaller fraction of my increased stock of existence and also because I am less often bored than I was in childhood between dull game and duller book. But that "quickening" depends precisely upon one's not being attentive to Time. (*Ada* 423)

[…] Everything, therefore, occurs as if sidereal time flowed four times faster for a man of fifty than for a children of ten. (…) As we grow older, not only do our lives tend to become fuller, but also a unit of physical time becomes smaller and smaller fraction of our past life. (Whitrow 66-67)

6)

Thinkers, social thinkers, feel the Present as pointing beyond itself toward a not yet realized 'future' ─ but that is topical utopia, progressive politics. (*Ada* 440)

[…] the characteristic feeling which constitutes the central part of our awareness of time. It is the feeling of the present pointing beyond itself toward a not yet realized future.

(Millič Čapek 452)

7)

The indistinguishable inane (Locke) of infinite space is mentally distinguishable (and indeed could not be imagined otherwise) from the ovoid "void" of Time. (*Ada* 425)

[…] he [Locke] made the significant comment that "when one can find out and frame in his mind clearly and distinctly the place of universe, he will be able to tell us whether it moves or stands still in the undistinguishable inane of infinite space." (Whitrow 244)

8)

Time is rhythm: the insect rhythm of a warm humid night, brain ripple, breathing, the drum in my temple ― these are our faithful timekeepers; and reason corrects the feverish beat. (*Ada* 421)

The rhythm of music, the beat of the clock and the daily rising of the sun are recognize as manifestations of equal intervals of time. Our senses, however, are not a good judge of equal intervals. (BE, *Time measurements* 224)

9)

Man, in that sense, will never die, because there may never be a taxonomical point in his evolutionary progress that could be determined as the last stage of man in the cline turning him into Neohomo, or some horrible, throbbing slime. (*Ada* 420)

Whereas time taken abstractly is an unfathomable continuum in endless flux, life *in* time exits both in the infinite chain of a species and in individual, finite forms. (Kümmel 33)

10)

I can listen to Time only between stresses, for a brief concave moment warily and worriedly, with the growing realization that I am listening not to Time itself but to the blood current coursing through my brain, and thence through the veins of the neck heartward, back to the seat of private throes which have no relation to Time. (*Ada* 422)

The harmonic analysis of the records is complicated, but four main types of rhythm, each characterized by a particular frequency range, have been recognized. Of these the most prominent in normal adults (specially at the back of the skull) is so called alpha-rhythm which ranges from about 8 to 12 cycles per second, with a central frequency of approximately 10 cycles per second. Goddy claims that this rhythm is the final abstraction from all other bodily rhythms and represents the culminating internal clock. (Whitrow 69)

11)

I shall now proceed to consider the Past as an accumulation of sensa, not as the dissolution of Time implied by immemorial metaphors picturing transition. (*Ada* 427)

For, whatever the laws of nature, the direction of time in our personal experience is the direction of increasing knowledge of events (Whitrow 270).

12)

Anyone, if he likes, may maintain that Space is the outside of Time, or the body of Time, or that Space is suffused with Time and vice versa, or that in some peculiar way Space is merely the waste product of Time, even its corpse, or that in the long, infinitely long, run Time *is* Space. (*Ada* 424)

Still another way to clarify the relation between space and time is to point out that time is the mind of space and space is the body of time. (Cornelius 28)

Space is full of Time and Time is full of Space, and because of this each of them is a complete or perfect continuum. (Alexander 65)

13)

'Space is a swarming in the eyes, and Time a singing in the ears,' says John Shade, a modern poet, as quoted by an invented philosopher ("Martin Gardiner") in *The Ambidextrous Universe*, page 165. (*Ada* 425)

Instead of appealing to motion, *with its spatial associations*, he [Saint Augustine] considered purely temporal phenomena—auditory rather than visual—such as the reading of a poem and the sounding of a voice. (Whitrow 48)

14)

The normal motorist, according to psychologists and policemen, can perceive, visually, a unit of time as short in extension as one tenth of a second (I had a patient, a former gambler, who could identify a playing card in a five-times-faster flash!). It would be interesting to measure the instant we need to become aware of disappointed or fulfilled expectations. Smells can be very sudden, and in most people the ear and sense of touch work quicker than the eye. Those two hitch-hikers really smelled — the male one revoltingly. (*Ada* 432)

A patient of mine could make out the rhythm of flashes succeeding one another every three milliseconds (0.003!). On. (*Ada* 421)

The shortest time in which *conscious* perception of auditory succession is possible (2 miliseconds) is about one-tenth that of visual succession (although the temporal interval necessary for discrimination between two successive flashes of light can be shortened by direct stimulation of a particular type of nervous tissue in the subcortical region of the brain […] With visual projection of an object for about 10 milliseconds an observer is consciously aware of something, but usually cannot say what it is. (Whitrow 80)

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Summary

In *Queering Nabokov: Postmodernist Temporalities and Eroticism in Ada, or Ardor,* Nathalia Saliba Dias approaches Vladimir Nabokov's late work from the perspective of Queer theory and Queer temporalities to investigate one particular combination of themes: the intersection of postmodernist temporalities, playfulness, and eroticism.
Nabokov's approach to time has been often associated with the modernist search for transcendence and timelessness, being interpreted in the light of Marcel Proust and Henri Bergosn. In *Ada, or Ardor* (1969), however, Nabokov embraces alternative forms of temporality, which are historically identified as feminine and queer (like rhythms and texture) in opposition to linearity, clock and calendar time, which are often associated with masculine time. Furthermore, Nabokov describes the character's memories as a sexual event and manipulates historical materials (photos, slides, books, etc.) as sexual objects. He also sexualizes his relationship with other authors in the composition of the novel, transforming literary history into a homoerotic and misogynistic relationship. Finally, Nabokov sexualizes his literary family and devices, especially parody, "inserting," "penetrating," and "manipulating" the material of others in his own writings in deviant ways.
The central argument of this thesis is that in *Ada, or Ardor* Nabokov finally focuses on a playful treatment of time (reflective nostalgia), as an embodied and sexual experience, rather than exploring time as a wish to reinstate his past in the presente (reparative nostalgia).

Keywords: Vladimir Nabokov, Time, Sexuality, Queer Theory

Zusammenfassung

In *Queering Nabokov: Postmoderne Zeitlichkeiten und Erotik in Ada, oder Ardor* nähert sich Nathalia Saliba Dias dem Spätwerk Vladimir Nabokovs aus der Perspektive der Queer-Theorie und der Queer-Zeitlichkeiten, um eine bestimmte Kombination von Themen zu untersuchen: die Überschneidung von postmodernen Zeitlichkeiten, Verspieltheit und Erotik.
Nabokovs Umgang mit der Zeit wurde oft mit der Suche der Moderne nach Transzendenz und Zeitlosigkeit in Verbindung gebracht und im Lichte von Marcel Proust und Henri Bergson interpretiert. In *Ada, oder Ardor* (1969) jedoch stellt Nabokov alternative Formen der Zeitlichkeit, die historisch als weiblich und seltsam identifiziert werden (wie Rhythmus und Textur), im Gegensatz zu Linearität, Uhr und Kalenderzeit, die oft mit männlicher Zeit assoziiert werden. Darüber hinaus beschreibt Nabokov die Erinnerungen der Figur als ein sexuelles Ereignis und manipuliert historisches Material (Fotos, Dias, Bücher usw.) als sexuelle Objekte. Er sexualisiert auch seine Beziehung zu anderen Autoren in der Komposition des Romans und verwandelt die Literaturgeschichte in eine homoerotische und frauenfeindliche Beziehung. Schließlich sexualisiert Nabokov seine literarische Familie und seine literarischen Mittel, insbesondere die Parodie, indem er das Material anderer in seinen eigenen Schriften auf abartige Weise "einfügt", "durchdringt" und "manipuliert".
Das zentrale Argument dieser Arbeit ist, dass Nabokov in *Ada, oder Ardor* schließlich einen spielerischen Umgang mit der Zeit (reflektierende Nostalgie) als verkörperte und sexuelle Erfahrung in den Mittelpunkt stellt, anstatt die Zeit als Wunsch zu erforschen, seine Vergangenheit in der Gegenwart wiederherzustellen (reparative Nostalgie).

Stichworte: Vladimir Nabokov, Zeit, Sexualität, Queer Theory